

YOUTH
NORTH

OLOF HALL

\$2.50

A gripping encounter with an arctic blizzard, the most insidious agent of death in the North, is made both the beginning and end of YOUTH NORTH. The author has used this tense, dramatic setting as a frame for the entire novel, fitting into it the adventures of two high-spirited and intelligent characters who represent youth at its best and worst. Without any guidebook descriptions of scenery, the reader is made to sense the very soul of a magnificent country, to breathe its exhilarating atmosphere, to chill to its merciless harshness. YOUTH NORTH is a frank, convincing story told in a style and manner inimitably its own.

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**YOUTH
NORTH**

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By
OLOF
HALL

1936



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**TO THE MEMORY
OF MY MOTHER**



DURING the course of events which came to shape and soon to end this story about the adventures of two emotional roamers, it so happened one midwinter day that I was mushing a dogteam on my way from Nome to a place on the lower Yukon River in Alaska. With the white of snow turning grey even in the near distance and looking almost like sand windblown into gently rolling dunes and leveled into smooth fields, the tundra I was now crossing seemed something like a tropic desert frozen into a miniature Sahara of the North—singularly monotonous, yet challenging one's fancy because of its very emptiness.

With its true contours blurred and softened in the haze, the Coast Range of Seward Peninsula looked like an artist's creation in blue and white for the mountainous background of a tremendous canvas and bringing out with infinite grace the cold soul of this arctic scenery. And it was all that now helped one distinguish between the dismal grey and white of the sky and the confusingly similar

color of the tundra's vast expanse of snow. Little tufts of fog were clinging to dents and rifts along the foothills. Long narrow streamers and wide sheets of frozen mist floated around in low places. And the cloudless vault of the sky was blanched by the cold into a pallor fitting the lifeless, eerie landscape.

After leaving the coast of Bering Sea a few hours ago, I was now following the old Eskimo trail eastward toward the mountains and the Interior. Only five dogs of small and mixed breeds were pulling at the towline of my heavily loaded sled. Every drift, every place with soft snow, and nearly every incline made it necessary for me to help, and the thought that I might as well get into a harness and be a dog myself was not entirely of a humorous nature. And while trying my best to make up for their deficiency in both size and number, I often reflected with the annoying inconsistency of a futile wish, that a few additional huskies would have helped matters considerably. Still, if aided by fair weather, luck, and my own ability to endure, I was confident that we should be able to reach the nearest and only roadhouse in this vicinity before nightfall. The last few days had taught me that, even at its best, traveling any considerable distance in this isolated part of Seward Peninsula could by no stretch of imagination be called a pleasure trip. Even the Eskimos shun the bleak coast regions in wintertime, and every musher learns to fear the

raging, killing snowstorms which often come with unexpected and terrible suddenness.

The white of snow and the light grey and pallid blue of arctic skies can melt together in a most confusing manner. Then there is no well-defined horizon, no end or beginning to land and sky. My eyes grew hungry for the want of something distinct and different to rest upon. A native and his dogteam had just passed. At first the approaching object had actually appeared as if coming out of the sky like a landing plane, simply due to the fact that it was descending a high but unrecognizable knoll. The illusion was so realistic that it left me bewildered for a long time. The tiring monotony and the many deceiving aspects of visibility were a few of the reasons why I always disliked traveling over the tundra. Instead of a vast, level flat, as it appears in winter even from a short distance, it is very uneven, rough, and intersected by many rivers and creeks meandering their course to the ocean. Equally deceiving is distance as the naked eye measures it. A mountain, cape, or hill, serving on clear days as a guiding landmark, usually appears so comfortably near. The experienced traveler, however, knows that this seeming nearness is always transformed into many unexpected and long miles.

Even if I would have been only too willing to exchange four of my dogs for two or three of those belonging to the Eskimo I had just met, I would

have kept my leader and that for reasons more practical than mere sentiment. A gift from a dear friend, he had taken a friend's place and after many a severe test proved himself worthy of trust and affection. My eyes grew moist as tenderness swept through me like little waves when I watched the large, thick-furred malamute at the end of the short towline. There was no doubt in my mind that this dog measured up to the most rigid standards of the North. More discerning and less biased men than his recent owners had praised him, so I knew I had not only a friend but also a good dog in Graben, the name he listened to. Every movement of his sinewy body indicated how eagerly he was doing his share to conquer the trail. Graben's willingness and sense of duty were truly admirable. Even while I was talking to him he never permitted the attention he gave me to interfere with his work. A mere whisper of his name always brought immediate response in a different wag of his wagging tail or in the quick turning of his head, but never at the expense of speed. The other dogs were of types now quite common in Alaska and representing a mixture of everything from lap dogs to malamutes. Though rarely attractive in appearance they often possess some of the best qualities of both native and outside breeds. But even if not much to brag about, I considered my dogs well worth the small investment.

With a few favorite phrases from the colorful

nomenclature of dogmushing I tried my best to encourage the dogs—and incidentally myself—to better effort, to more speed. The zest in "Mush on, mush on . . . !" must have been carried on wings of frost-laden air far out over the echoless wasteland. It was encouraging to see how readily the alert animals responded, how they strained a little more at their picket ropes, even now when so weary from a long and hard trek. Man is indeed never quite alone or helpless, no matter how lonely and exacting life may be, as long as he enjoys and appreciates the devotion of a dog. That is one infatuation Alaska gave me for life.

Only the dogs knew the invisible trail we were following. Not even the ever-moving, ever-changing snow could obliterate the infinitesimal scent left by the many dogteams which must have mashed over it. In the North man has learned to rely on dogs, knowing that he can always trust such uncanny factors of safety as a sensitive nose and other inexplicable instincts. There must be some truth to a thought which once came to me: "To have faith in your dogs is just another form of believing in God."

We had now been on the trail some six or seven hours. Two or three hours ago a lethargic sun had lifted itself as if with tremendous effort over the horizon; now it was again vanishing, conquered, it seemed, by this barren and hostile empire of snow and ice. Somehow, it was a relief to see the big disc,

at which one could look with unprotected eyes, sink down way out on Bering Sea. It was not like the sun which brings light and warmth; it was more like a large, lazy, and sluggish moon. Mushing was becoming difficult, more so in fact than I had experienced since leaving Nome. We were near the foothills, I thought, judging more by topographical conditions than by the apparent nearness of the mountains. The scented trail was followed without any attempt on my part to interfere with the leader, despite the many obstacles encountered. Storms had built innumerable snow-drifts, obviously preferring to place them across instead of alongside our course. We crossed or avoided these as the leader happened to choose. My Graben was in absolute command.

The dogs were in need of food and rest. Their harness was good and they were also equipped with canvas boots. During the frequent but short stops I always examined this essential protection against frost and the sharp, cutting ice and snow-crust. A lame or otherwise disabled dog would inevitably mean the necessity of abandoning from my load the equivalent of what it was able to pull. Losing provisions might in my reduced circumstances result in some very unpleasant form of want.

There was something about the sunset which I instinctively disliked. Entirely too much color in the splendor of this unusual display, I thought. To

my right, in the southeast, and near a point where I had seen a pallid-white and cold sun rise, the mountains came to an abrupt end on a long cape which extended several miles out into the ocean. This protruding tongue of land must have obstructed the arctic icepack in its course, resulting in an indescribable upheaval which for all the world looked like a miniature alpine country. And from a near distance it appeared as unreal and fantastic as a stage setting in glass and cotton for a fairy play. The ordeal of traveling through it, however, inspired no such poetic reflections.

Being closer to the vanishing source of light and life, the cape rose even more majestically than the higher mountains of the same range against the fading red of the sky. The sun had also left some of its rich colors on the steep sides and there they lingered long after sunset and in odd contrast to the monotonous grey of the dying day. Occasionally I stopped, threw back the hood of my reindeer parka, and gazed in amazement at the unusual spectacle. First it puzzled me, then I felt my curiosity grow into something more akin to premonition. My eyes could not yet quite distinguish what was happening, but when I noticed how veils of snow were being swirled around the cape in graceful serpentines by a light breeze, then I knew what was to be expected. It was the vanguard of a storm, of another arctic blizzard. A few minutes later I stopped again. The snow was

now rising in small clouds above the cape and, while I was still gazing and wondering, they continued to grow in size and number until all lines of land and horizon were blurred and finally erased. This queer dance of wind and snow was still confined to the immediate vicinity of the cape, and neither a breath of wind nor a single visible cloud confirmed the warning nature had broadcast long before my conscious mind could form it into anything more definite than a vague forecast.

Daylight was slowly waning into the long twilight of the Arctic. Even if mellowed by the moon or the eerie glow of Aurora Borealis, a night on the trail is shunned by travelers. They know only too well that night is no time to be abroad when a blizzard happens along. My dogs must have felt an instinctive urge to hurry because they responded more willingly. There was a bit of mockery in the realization of how insignificant everything had now become when overshadowed by this one imperative desire to escape the storm. Nothing else mattered; it was the new goal of my trip. And as uncontrollable fear gripped my heart, I again realized the inadequacy of my structure of philosophy, or my courage, besides experiencing that even a necessary rearrangement is not always a pleasant task. With an equally sudden reaction, however, I shook my apprehension, and hope and self-reliance returned with renewed strength.

The silence which reigned during the poignant

eternity of the next hour could not have been more remarkably perfect. Nature seemed to be preparing itself for an impending upheaval; it was holding its breath for a real blow. It actually sounded as a discord to break the superb quietude with the grating noise of the sleigh-runners, with the fast, labored breathing of the dogs and my own voice pleading for more speed. Gradually the air became heavy and oppressive as if charged with some latent energy about to break loose with sudden frenzy. It was warmer although still well below zero. The trail along the foothills proved to be worse than expected, but somehow it did not discourage me. In Alaska one learns to anticipate the worst in order to be better prepared to accept things as they actually are.

Steep ridges, ravines, and drifts taxed our strength and endurance to the limit. It was a back-breaking task to prevent the heavy sled from turning over and from running into the dogs when descending the many treacherous slopes. The mountain pass could no longer be seen through the thickening dusk of twilight. A few miles beyond that entrance I would find the shelter and safety of a roadhouse. There was a rush of gentle thoughts when I noticed how willingly my dogs labored, how readily they obeyed every command. It is on the trail where one learns to understand and appreciate the incredibly strong tie which can exist between a man and a dog.

At last, with a few gentle puffs, came the soft murmur of still distant wind, growing rapidly in strength but not yet lifting or moving any loose snow. The race with the storm was lost with the roadhouse almost in sight—there was no escape from the dreaded combat. I stopped the team for another brief rest. The sled with its well-secured load was examined, ropes were tightened, and the dogs attended to as well as I could under the circumstances. After sharing some smoked salmon with my canine friends, I slipped a light canvas parka over the one of fur and when ready to start I felt prepared for the worst. Graben alone, though probably the most tired dog in the team, refused to lie down, and he tugged impatiently at the towline; he knew what was expected of him. Even if it should prove impossible to travel on much longer, I was sure that we could find some sheltered place and make camp. Again and again I turned over in my mind what to do, knowing that my penalty for even the slightest mistake might be the highest ever paid by man—death! A hard crust covered the snowdrifts, but with the rapidly increasing velocity of the wind it was not long before little flakes and pellets of ice began to travel with a scratching, grinding sound. Presently the loosened snow had grown into dense clouds, quickly rising higher and higher until we were completely swallowed up in a horrid thickness of blinding snow. My eyes strained in a futile

effort to pierce this impenetrable veil. Twilight still reigned but I felt as helpless as if lost in the densest blackness of night.

Although fear at first had nearly paralyzed my mind, I soon managed to shake its grip of terror. And when again myself, I even felt like shouting a challenge to the mad elements. There was a peculiar glow and thrill in knowing that I was about to encounter what might prove to be the greatest adventure in my life. Still I realized the danger of being caught in the fury of an arctic storm, and most of my courage must have been merely a normal reaction to desperation and fear.

The blizzard struck first from the side. The winding trail, however, often made it necessary to face the direct onslaught of the wind. It was rapidly growing darker. I could not see my own gloved hands as they gripped the handle of the sled; the dogs had long been lost in the grey darkness, and no sound could be heard above the steady roar of the wind and the drifting snow. By closing the hooded parka tightly over my face, I tried to protect myself against the snow, but enough penetrated to melt, or still worse, to form a sharp, irritating crust around my cheeks and forehead. My hands were as if welded to the handle of the sled. Their firm grip thereon seemed to be my hold on life and hope. I had a great deal of confidence in the dogs, but even if they should fail me before finding a sheltered place, there was still a fair

chance to ride out this storm. Once safely in my fur-lined sleeping bag, I might hold my own for several days against any blizzard. My clothing had kept me warm. My feet were sore and tired, but the grass-filled mukluks had so far furnished excellent protection against both dampness and cold.

The sled now stuck fast in almost every snow-drift, no matter how hard I tried to prevent it. Loose snow added much to the hard going. When the storm began, only a few miles could have remained to the roadhouse. It seemed that since then I had already covered twice the distance and experienced a bit of eternity in hell. Every moment was crowded with so many tense thoughts and critical happenings that time crawled at a snail's pace. At times I even feared that Graben had lost the trail. My only guide as to direction was the wind, and we seemed to be changing our course constantly. This was, of course, due to the winding trail, yet I could not accept that all was well when it so often struck its blows from every side. After we had battled face to face with the gale for some time, I realized that the torture could not be endured much longer. But just as I was going to stop for another rest the sled careened around a sharp turn, and that same powerful force which had held us back until hardly any progress could be made, now just as vigorously helped to push us forward.

If still on the right trail, it should not be more than a mile or so to the roadhouse—probably less.

The snowdrifts, however, proved more and more difficult to cross, even with the wind from behind. The dogs were tugging faintly at the gang-line. With a last desperate effort to climb over a high bank, the sled finally stuck fast, then toppled over and buried itself in deep, soft snow.

Without releasing my hold on the sled, I collapsed, crumpling as if struck a terrific blow. It felt like a taut string had snapped; every muscle relaxed and into my raging brain came the contrast of infinite peace, the superb calm of approaching sleep or coma. But after what seemed a timeless interval, the instinctive fear of disaster stirred me into consciousness with a warning that to fall asleep now would also mean death.

Slowly I rose to my feet, fell, and then rose again. Dazed and weak, feeling as if I were coming out of a drunken stupor, I stood for a long time lost in a maze of distorted thoughts. It was an act of will-power to place myself again in the strange setting of this storm and to gather up the lost threads until conscious of what had happened. My first clear thought was the realization that I could not expect to reach the roadhouse until after the storm had abated in fury. Good or bad, this was the place where I must camp. A pull loosened the rope around the canvas cover, and in a few moments I had secured my sleeping bag, a kit containing food and several other items always kept handy for emergencies. A drink of rum rushed

and burned like a stream of life-giving warmth through my veins. But I put back the bottle, because the thought struck me that it must not be found on me in case this should chance to be my last adventure.

Quickly I fastened one end of a long rope around my waist, leaving the other tied to the sled. After groping around, I soon found what seemed a suitable spot for my own abode. The dogs had all disappeared but I knew that they were safely tucked in under a protective cover of snow. With the aid of a short shovel it did not take long to burrow a good-sized hole in the lee side of a high bank. It did not seem likely that the snow would increase the height of the drift at this place, because with the wind coming from the same direction most of it would be placed on the other side; in fact, it might be more apt to take away some of the snow and necessitate further digging in to avoid exposure.

So far, everything had turned out as well as could be expected. The difficult task of getting into the sleeping bag was also managed without letting in much snow—though heaven only knows how—thus eliminating immediate danger of dampness and cold from that source. Broken words of gratitude passed over my lips as I finally relaxed after my first encounter with the howling demon of the tundra. I was too tired to resist sleep. This time, however, it came stealing upon me not as an

agent of death, but as a promise of safe relief from the racking agony of weariness.

Whether hours or only a few minutes had passed during this first interim of comalike sleep is something I shall never know more definitely than a mere guess. Somehow it seemed a long, long time. There was a new feeling of security and self-reliance when I woke. As expected, the storm had not increased the drift, although considerable snow had packed itself tightly around me, thus making it difficult to move. The sleeping bag still kept me comfortably warm, but dampness was already noticeable. I did not dare to open up for ventilation fearing that snow might come in and make it worse.

The storm continued with the same intensity and terrifying might. Its steady, whining roar was lowered only during brief intervals. I really dreaded these interruptions because they always made me expect something worse to follow. With warmth and rest, however, other thoughts entered my mind. I often wondered what time of the day or night it might be. It proved a difficult task to extract my watch from an inside pocket but it was worth the effort. Hearing it tick its message of passing time gave me something different and impersonal to think about. The watch became like a friendly, living thing with a heart beating in the clear, cheerful tone of a little silver bell. Never before had I realized to what extent one depends

upon knowledge of time. It seemed so all-important to find some way of recording the laggard stride of its flight. Just to be able to count the ticks until they grew into units of minutes and even hours made me feel strangely contented. Almost oblivious of my plight I whiled away considerable time in this manner and when the watch accidentally slid out of the bag and was lost in the snow I felt as if a friend had left me.

Although still fully awake a peculiar stupor had seized me. Years seemed crowded into hours, vivid sights flashed into view in the impenetrable darkness about me—dreams and thoughts rushed by in a fantastic cavalcade, all within the shell of a worn-out, tired-to-death body laboring with the strength only desperation can give. As judge, listener and even narrator, I saw reviewed—felt and heard it—the dramatic story of my own life. Perhaps the play had now reached close to its very end and my mind was rehearsing some of its more significant scenes while a final curtain was slowly falling—I thought of this, too, although without any apprehension. Death I had faced before and it had lost much of its terror. If it were my swan song the blizzard was now howling, I knew that life's inexorable finis would come stealing upon me softly and lull me to sleep much as a mother would her child and then release me without fear, pain, or agony. No, I was not afraid.

A dreamer, I had learned, is seldom lonely, seldom

quite alone. There is always someone at his beck and call. I could picture Audrey, the woman I loved, with me at will and as I best thought of her: an irresistible child woman with all the innate grace and proud bearing only daughters of Latin countries possess; with a soft smile seldom breaking out into open mirth; with wistful and searching eyes and with lips always so temptingly red from the rich paint of youth and kisses—there could be no one fairer in fancy or reality! Then again I could go back to Dawson, to Lousetown, and hear her sob and moan in pain, then see her sway and fall while little drops of blood slowly trickled from an ugly gash by her quivering mouth—drops of blood that were still falling like heavy blows on my heart. Cursing, hating, drinking, I had reeled through a long revelry of chaotic emotions while trying vainly to forget the fairest and finest that had ever come into my life—strange how only a memory can make one's pulses race so swiftly, can make one's heart feel like bursting!

But what a terrible jest of Destiny if on the very eve of meeting we were to be cheated by death—we two who had searched and longed and hoped over what seemed a space of eternity itself, from Atlin to Nome.

Fighting sleep as if it were an anesthetic I struggled and tossed in my sleeping bag. My lips and throat were parched and sore, and when I wanted to cry for help my words were choked and stifled

into a rasping whisper. But this agony lasted only a short time, and I was calm and resigned when the deadline of semiconsciousness was crossed. Neither asleep nor awake, I now entered another reality. The blizzard with all its din and terror was no more; in fact, I remember very little about its constant reign until toward the end of my adventure. Despite this physical oblivion, my mind seemed to function strangely unhindered by normal limitations of consciousness. My past was mine to live over again, mine to scan and review as if thrown on the silver screen of a dream cinema. I returned to my childhood home and the affection for loved ones felt like tight fingers around my throat. Schooldays, though so near in years, were drowned in such an uncontrollable flood of emotions that they all seemed contained in the climax of my graduation. Restless and ambitious, and much to the chagrin of a foolishly proud family with a proud name, I stubbornly insisted on seeking a career abroad. In fancy I again crossed the ocean, but there was now added the pathos and comedy of eventually unmasked romance and adventure as background to my review. Then I worked and hoped and planned and learned about a new land as only a curious emigrant and credulous scholar can. Then in retrospect back on trails westward to the Pacific Coast and northward to Atlin, Yukon, Dawson, Yukon again, and Nome, with

more of hectic excitement and grey tedium than is good for the susceptible soul of a dreamer.

Barriers of time and space were down, and I was hurled out into an unfettered world at the touch of the magic wand of a dream. . . .

2

WITH the sharp edge of anger my partner's voice cut through the raucous noises of a moving freight train:

"Damn you, you low-down, rotten, stealing son-of-a—"

Running alongside the train, my raging friend Ed continued to pour the unprintable curses and vile threats he so readily could command over the even more vociferous brakeman who had just thrown us off a freight now pulling out from a small Canadian town near the Pacific Coast. A long row of creaking and clattering boxcars was quickly gaining speed. I had managed to catch and hold on to a rung on a steel ladder of the same car on top of which one of the brakemen was standing. His hard, sneering face hovered like that of a spectre directly above me, but I was too desperate to realize the danger he represented—I thought of him only as the keeper, or the thief, of my suitcase, of the few possessions which until now had survived the vicissitudes of a long vagabond journey.

My voice often choked with rage as I continued to plead, threaten, and again plead for something which at this moment seemed precious enough to risk my very life for. Still cursing, the brakeman started to descend the ladder. He bared his teeth in a snarl which made him look like a beast of prey, but still I hung on. In another moment his feet were on the same rung and almost level with my head, and before I could let go he kicked at my hand, swiftly and with the brutal force of a fiend. My whole body went numb, and somehow I did not even seem to be able to release my hold until another blow had landed across my knuckles. The heavy shoe dug deep into the flesh of several fingers, but it glanced off before inflicting any real serious injury. I felt blood squirt over my hands and face, and then I let go of the bar. Dazed and still unconscious of any pain, I did not realize what had happened until it was all over. Even my own shrill cry when I fell sounded to me as if uttered by someone else. Fortunately I must have struck a soft, grassy spot because in a few moments I was on my feet, feeling a bit groggy and shaken but experiencing no other discomfort than the pain in my blood-smeared hand.

Thus it happened that Ed and I found our vagabond journey by rail suddenly terminated, in a manner both expected and undoubtedly deserved, although we felt it could have been accomplished just as affectively without all the brutality and

humiliation. Vagabond life is hard enough as it is, but its sternness on the road of steel is much worse, something seldom tempered by mercy, rarely mellowed by sentiment. We were now beginning to adjust ourselves to its grim code, although I remained too sensitive to become really hardened. This was another occasion for a relapse into self-pity, and I noticed that my partner also sought solace in bewailing what we both considered an undeserved fate. The hardest blow to me, however, was the loss of a suitcase containing all of my personal belongings: my only suit of clothes, other indispensable wearing apparel, several old heirlooms, and many trinkets which sentiment refuses to measure merely in value of gold. Still no matter how badly needed now, most of these things could be replaced when our luck turned, but I could never hope to regain possession of my fondest treasure, my diary, the book to which I had given so much of myself during years of romantic youth. That beloved book had grown to be like a friend with whom I could chat frankly and at length, could confess my many and frequent mistakes, and at least pretend to have them understood and forgiven; also plead, hope, dream, and live, as only an emotionalist can, some semblance of the spiritual and intellectual life I craved with all the fervor of my heart. Rage soon gave away to self-accusing regrets. I felt utterly lonesome and homesick. This new country was beginning to frighten me with

an awesome, forbidding strangeness that eluded and defied me, no matter how hard I tried to learn and to succeed. Tolerated, yes, but somehow I was already convinced that I was not wanted, not even for a fair trial. And so we were again beating trains and tramping highways, bound for parts with a climate more congenial for the jobless class to which I of late belonged with a most unpleasant regularity.

A sharp, shrill call from the loyal friend who had shared my misfortune on the freight train, called my attention to a passenger train which was quickly gaining speed after leaving the station. Alert and with trained cautiousness, we prepared to board the blind of the last car. Ed was running ahead of me, and I saw his lean, athletic body bend forward for the dangerous leap. He jumped with hands outstretched to grab a railing, but faster than my eye could see how it happened, he was thrown head first, sprawling in the sharp, crushed rock by the rails. Slowly he struggled to his feet, dazed by the hard fall and when, in a few moments, I came to his side I found that his scratched face was so smeared with blood and dirt that it almost defied recognition.

We were now being watched from the station-house. To avoid further unwelcome consequences, we ran over to a near-by river bank where I bandaged my hand with a handkerchief and assisted Ed in cleaning his numerous scratches. Only walk-

ing appealed to us now. Nothing seemed more disagreeable than the very idea of ever again trying to travel as nonpaying passengers on a train—any kind of a train.

A migratory worker, or if preferred, a hobo, tramp, stiff, or vagabond, rarely needs a road map. His best guide is a railway time-table. His highway may be plastered with "No Trespass" signs, but seldom is his assumed privilege to walk along a railroad right-of-way interferred with. Only when attempting to ride a freight or a passenger train, or if he is unable to slip a dollar or more to a grafting brakeman, is he inviting woe, wrath, and disaster such as we had just experienced.

To walk over a highway of steel and ties is hard work, hard on mind and body. It certainly was not designed for the use of legs as mode of transportation—that is with my legs as a yardstick. The distance between two ties is entirely too short, and if one tie is skipped it requires an unnaturally and uncomfortably long step. In between is just right, but this intermediate space is filled with loose gravel or sharp, crushed rock. With long training and the right kind of philosophy, or lack of it, I suppose one might eventually become adjusted to some of its peculiarities. I never could. The regularity of the uneven ties, the endless, ugly, snakelike rails, the deadening strain of having to watch my steps constantly, preyed on my mind,

and only a few miles made walking a mental as well as a physical torture.

Until now so abruptly ended, several hundred miles had been successfully covered with the unwilling assistance of freight trains. Through the oversight or neglect of a trainmaster, we had been accepted as regular attendants in charge of several carloads of steers and hogs which were being shipped from the Middle West to the Pacific Coast. To my surprise I was even permitted to travel with the train crew and, in the midst of unpaid and undeserved comfort, was fortunate enough to enjoy going through the majestic Canadian Rockies. This privilege was not extended to my companion. After a couple of days, however, the trainmaster discovered that the official documents did not reveal my name and standing; in fact, all they showed must have been that I should be nonexistent. Things happened quickly after that.

There was no opportunity to plead for mercy before the trainmaster and brakemen. I was thrown off before I could open my mouth. I was also warned that at least capital punishment would be my fate did I ever engage in the folly of boarding their train again. Fortunately this happened while the train was standing on a siding. I was scared, but still more afraid of being left alone and broke in this desolate, mountainous country. It was not all courage which prompted me to again favor my former hosts with my company. Fear must have

given me some of the cunning and strength of a desperate animal. The deep dusk also helped. Somehow I caught a handle, felt my body jerk up, swing out, and then slam hard against the side of a car. Scarcely aware of how it had all happened, I again found myself a nonpaying passenger on the mighty Canadian Pacific Railway.

The caboose, last car of the train and reserved for the train crew, also had some sort of an observation tower from where I had been permitted to peruse the beauty of the Rocky Mountains. It was now occupied by men whom I knew to be more interested in looking for the likes of me than in scenery. Besides brakemen I dreaded many other things on this trip, but nothing more than the tunnels with their blinding, choking smoke, horrible noise, and darkness.

To find my friend's hiding place on the train was my chief objective, and this I wanted to achieve before dark. At the next stop, unless I was successful in finding a better and safer location, it would be necessary to leave the train to avoid detection, and then I had to go through the ordeal of boarding it again. This I feared not only because of the physical risk involved, but also because I realized that all cards were stacked against me, so sooner or later I would lose out and be left behind. Ed had the suitcase containing my all of worldly treasures. A cold shiver ran up and down my back

at the thought of parting with a trusted pal and facing the world alone as a penniless vagabond.

Another tunnel and I felt as if the grimy soot had penetrated my very skin. The smoke with its nauseating gases left me dazed and groggy. If there ever was a time when I needed to be alert and on guard, this was certainly one. Fortunately, the mountain air soon cleared my head. Cautiously I climbed up between the cars and peered over the top. Burnished colors of sunset were spread thickly and with that almost unrealistic excess of splendor which makes one stand in awe before something not only beautiful but also beyond comprehension. The general contour of the country did not indicate any immediate danger of another tunnel, so I decided to take a chance. I made slow progress over the boards which formed an uncomfortably narrow walk on top of the swinging, shaking car, not daring to lift my body more than a few inches and mostly dragging myself slowly forward. After an unsuccessful search of the next car I dared it again in a similar manner until at last rewarded by finding my partner, snugly, peacefully sleeping in a small enclosure on the upper deck of a car filled—or rather crowded—with hogs. Although designed and reserved for feed and other necessities for its legitimate passengers, the car had offered friend Ed enough space to be not only comfortable but also to enjoy seclusion and privacy from snooping brakemen. A horrible stench filled the air, but

our hardened senses soon accepted this antithesis of fragrance as an additional aid against discovery.

"Gave you up as lost, Donn, when I saw you among the trainmen," exclaimed Ed as he greeted me with a mixture of joy and friendly sarcasm. "They are bad company for tramps, don't you know. Stick to your own class, Donn. That's what I'm doing as you see by the company I now keep. Make yourself at home. You know I was always bashful, Donn; modesty is very becoming, especially to bums like you and me. Say, wouldn't your folks have a fit if they could see you now."

"Rub it in, Ed—I deserve it. If it wasn't for this smell, I wouldn't mind the pigs, but, good God, it's sure horrible."

"Cheer up, bo," he chuckled. "By tomorrow you won't even notice it, unless your aristocratic nose is too damn sensitive."

Inspecting railroad men frequently opened the small door leading to our compartment and looked in, but they must have been satisfied with its orderly appearance, or the stench drove them away. Our willingness to assist in feeding the pigs pleased the regular attendants and they did everything in their power to shield and help us. Ed had succeeded in arranging sacks containing hog feed in a manner cleverly and efficiently hiding us and also making it inconvenient to attempt a thorough search. The necessity to leave in order to get food during the many and long stops was a dangerous undertaking.

It finally led to the discovery of our hiding place, but not until on the last lap of the journey. Up to that time our numerous foraging expeditions had been fairly successful, and we had managed to keep hunger at a respectful distance in spite of scanty and irregular meals.

The memory of the painful eviction from the train and the loss of our belongings preyed heavily on our minds as we tramped on, penniless, dejected, and with the beginning of a gnawing hunger. A forlorn little coin was discovered in a pocket, and it held out the cheerful prospect of having at least a loaf of bread with which to celebrate our arrival in the coast metropolis. The soles of my shoes were nearly worn out; our overalls were ragged and saturated with the odor from our dumb traveling companions. Haggard, tired and unshaven, we must have presented an all but pleasant picture. My own physical discomfort was overshadowed by the bitter loss of the suitcase and its precious contents, so I hardly gave anything else a thought.

From a distance, however, or from the position of one remembering the lost charms of his own youth, or with a philosopher's attitude of calm meditation, these two vagabonds in a setting of so much scenic beauty and with the background of youth and adventure, should have presented a picture of deep and serious interest: both were typical of the best, browned by sun, hardened by outdoor life and with eyes clean and clear as crystal and

with the eager, wistful look of searchers for adventure and romance.

We were not tramps or hoboes; we were wandering knights in search of the Grail.

3

IT has always thrilled me to enter an unknown city, but never as it did while a roaming youth and again never as when on that unforgettable summer day the high buildings and towers of a hilly coast metropolis pierced the sky line in a mighty panorama for two tired and hungry seekers of work and hospitality. It was comfort in the thought that there was not much to lose and something, be it ever so little, to gain if this fair city would grant our appeal for a chance to prove our worth.

Appearances, and almost everything else for that matter, were certainly against us. Ed's scratched face threatened to be an open invitation to every police officer to scrutinize closer, and that would undoubtedly result in another case of "suspicious character held on open charge for further questioning." With rags and patches, the nauseating odor of hogs, obvious absence of funds, and many other unmistakable signs of hunger and exposure, the picture must have been nearly complete. We

realized that it would require careful and ingenious plans to break down the expected reserve of this city toward two most suspicious-looking uninvited guests.

On a vacant lot which had a somewhat obscure location in the outskirts, we found a sheltered place where we could attend to such preliminaries as cleaning up and consuming a large loaf of bread into which our last dime had been converted. The sole on one of my shoes was now completely gone; the sock was also worn through, exposing tender skin which soon blistered and finally developed painful sores. Fortunately, a safety razor had been salvaged. A shave improved Ed's ugly face, making it almost passable, at least in subdued light or from some distance. Our clothes were beyond much improvement, except to the extent of removing some of the dust and dirt and trimming off the ragged edges. We really succeeded better than first expected to change our grimy selves into the semblance of a pair of workingmen returning from not too clean a vocation. The foul smell proved impossible to remove entirely and it remained, besides Ed's face and my lack of shoe leather, our most serious handicap.

When the light but cold mist began to creep in from the bay, we set out to solve our two most imperative problems; first, to pass through the city unmolested by any officer of the law and reach the waterfront with its near-by slums; second, to find

shelter for the night. Not until actually experienced did I know that the Persian tentmaker's meal could be so complete and satisfactory even without the wine—or the woman either. One single loaf of bread changed the beginning of despair into buoyant hopes; courage and self-respect returned, and somehow the world looked much more inviting and encouraging. The Gods have sundry ways of making man happy.

Ed was more accustomed to this precarious manner of existing. He did not care one iota about the opinions of others, did not mind being looked down upon, despised, or disregarded. This nonchalant attitude made it much easier for him to try and to carry out successfully many and various methods of obtaining work and money. Although generally honest and always fair, he often devised schemes which timidity and pride did not permit me to consider.

On our way through one of the suburbs we noticed a large crew of men employed at land-clearing. Their apparent easy and good-natured manner of working appealed strongly to me. These men were laboring without the rush and efficiency to which I was so accustomed; in fact, it was hard to believe my own eyes.

The unconcerned attitude of the foremen also impressed me favorably. Without even discussing the matter with Ed—although he claimed ever after that he tried to stop me—I walked up to a

tall, pleasant-looking man, evidently the foreman in charge, and asked him for a job. At first a look of surprise crept into his eyes, and something of an ejaculation trembled unspoken on his lips. Then he began to size me up very carefully as if appraising my physical aptitude for manual labor, and after an uncomfortably long pause he finally burst into a roar of laughter. I could not fathom any reason for this most unusual reception. When I noticed that we were being observed by all near us, I realized that something must be radically wrong. Seeing my discomfort and surprise, I obtained, between new and violent fits of mirth, an explanation of this comedy. I had actually applied for work with a crew of city prisoners, called a chain gang, and consisting of men sentenced to short terms for minor offenses.

The humiliating awkwardness of the situation brought tears to my eyes, but the guard revealed himself as very kind and considerate. After a long and friendly conversation, I felt much relieved. His advice where to obtain more honorable and remunerative work proved even to Ed that this joke on me was not without some compensation.

I shall never forget what my pal said and continued to say after this incident. To him the subject was to remain a favorite theme, an object of training in story-telling, a fascinating mental exercise, colored vividly by all the interesting things which should have happened in order to make it a

real tale, and, to my never-ending disgust, always spiced with biting sarcasm. Somehow I always failed when personal misfortunes and mistakes were used as argumentative weapons against me in our frequent controversies. Whenever friend Ed sensed defeat in a word battle, up would come this or some other story, and he could quite victoriously prove what a damn fool and saphead I really was. It was the eternal triumph of might, and, in all fairness to my opponent in these arguments, I must say that he was to a certain extent justified in using irony to offset lack of knowledge and interest in subjects in which I was comparatively well versed. The contrast in our mental and physical make-up nevertheless constituted the strength in our partnership. He was strong, athletic, alert, carefree, and blessed with a mind never disturbed by any semblance of philosophy except that he, as a matter of fact, and without ever giving it a thought, accepted materialism in its most practical meaning. Mother Nature might have been niggard in many respects, but she had made up for all that by endowing him with a heart, strong in friendship, big in sympathy with suffering and need. Despite many dissonant characteristics, we had much in common, and we needed each other on the rough journey.

It was dark when we reached the slum district near the waterfront and, without inquiring, we soon located the part most frequented by transient

workingmen. We felt at home on the narrow streets with their thronged sidewalks, noisy saloons, Jewish stores, employment offices, and cheap hotels. Without hesitation, Ed began to strike up acquaintances with men who appeared to him as possibly having the desirable combination of prosperity and generosity. Timidly I followed behind, much to my unabashed friend's disgust. He voiced his opinion of me quite strongly and to my repeated question: "Did you get anything?" I received curt and sarcastic answers. I knew him well enough to appreciate his feelings toward my inability to assist and also knew that his last and only penny would, no matter what happened, be shared with me. Despite combined cheek and arduous labor, the result was only a drink or two, but Ed had warmed up to his undertaking, and we were both confident of eventual success. The evening still had an hour or so to live, but we were tired and the streets offered no known lodgings for the likes of us. The waterfront with its sawmills and other industrial plants seemed the most likely part of town to look for a place to sleep. After some search we found a mill yard which looked safe and we steered our eager steps toward a fence which surrounded high piles of lumber. After successfully scaling the enclosure, erected, we thought, more for looks than for protection, we walked cautiously around until our search was abruptly ended by encountering a watchman. He looked ugly, big and formidable to

us, and no doubt he was. An all but merry chase resulted from the meeting, but young feet, agile bodies, and frightened hearts won the race to freedom and safety outside his realm of lumber. Most of what little courage we might have had was now gone, and we never attempted to trespass where we suspected the presence of any watchman. Finally a small fishing boat near the wharf, turned upside down and apparently discarded, attracted our attention. It would provide at least a roof, and roof was about all we could expect besides reasonable safety from police interference. Jokingly I remarked that imagination was to replace the usual requisites of comfort and peaceful slumber. But neither courage nor good cheer helped much when cold fog came and enveloped our shivering bodies. The wet chill entered with every breath; it penetrated my clothing and my hands went numb with cold and slimy like everything I touched. Only the close embrace provided a little protection. Morning was slower than ever to arrive, and even before the advent of a rising sun we were walking the deserted streets. We were more tired and dejected than before this unpleasant experience of a sleepless night. And the creeping torture of hunger was now gaining foreground as the most important problem to be solved.

Presently Ed had engaged an early pedestrian in a conversation, and the result was what we least needed but gladly accepted: a drink. The raw

liquor on our empty stomachs fired us with a hectic rush of blood which broke down all of Ed's reserve and for a while even tempted me to assist in his efforts. Recent exposures had not helped a tooth-ache of long standing, and my sore feet had not improved, so it certainly seemed as though everything had conspired to bring about a supreme trial of physical endurance.

Wealth was in evidence everywhere—we were, so to speak, walking on gold, seeing it, touching it, every moment, every step. What an ironic parody on the theme of equality in these obvious contrasts of wealth and poverty. Vast storehouses filled with treasures from every land lined the waterfront for miles, and still thousands of those whose hands had created it wandered by hungry, homeless, and poorly clad. No wonder this injustice kindles hatred against a society tolerating such unequal division of wealth without any effective or sincere efforts to correct it. And now I belonged with all my heart on the side of the lowly in their struggle for a fair and just share of all necessities of life. It is every man's indisputable birthright, his inherited property to own and to control decent, steady labor for a compensation sufficient to enable a high standard of living.

Employment offices were catering to us with their wares of work, and we did a lot of window shopping at these places. Many jobs were listed on the blackboards, but as usual the supply was larger

than the demand. Hardly any work could be had for less than a couple of dollars, and higher cash commissions were demanded for the more remunerative positions. Possessing no funds, we could only view with longing these attractive chances. A few construction camps, with evil reputations, were offering jobs requiring a fee of only one dollar. But no report to the contrary could change their attractiveness—we were willing to do anything. It does not take long for hunger and want to change one's outlook.

A kind fate, however, must have decided that we had suffered well and long enough to be entitled to some relief. Ed did not succeed very well at his eager attempts to borrow, as he called his solicitations—beg was too harsh a word even for his calloused senses. Some claimed to be broke, while others flatly turned him down. Except for several drinks to which he had been treated and no doubt enjoyed, especially with my watching him from a respectful distance, he had failed completely. Late in the evening we steered our steps toward Chinatown. Walking a few feet ahead of my companion, I was as usual carefully scanning the sidewalk and gutter, hoping against hope to find something of value. Crossing an intersection I saw a crumpled-up piece of paper. It did not look quite right, and it really appealed to me only with its element of mystery. When it rested in my hand I was still uncertain of its identity, but after unfolding the

filthy and wet paper, I stared in wide-eyed wonder at the alluring beauty of a Canadian five-dollar bill. Speechless and bewildered by this unexpected possession of wealth, it took several moments before I could collect myself. The temptation to make it known to Ed in some effective manner was too strong to resist. Turning around and finding him, as I expected, ignorant of my discovery, I said in a slow but emphatic voice:

"Ed, let's go over to some nice restaurant and end our misery with a real square meal. Come on, be a sport. What do we care what happens; let us eat, drink and be merry just this once more—come on—here's a place."

"Now you've sure gone loony," he snapped back contemptuously. "I knew it would go to your head. Shut up, and see if you can't do your part without getting us both locked up."

His eyes met mine. Besides contempt and bitterness they also registered so much weariness and dull despair that I felt pity swell my heart. He was a fine pal; that was all that mattered now. I could not for the life of me suppress a grin, but it was one of relief, and I could see that it puzzled my friend.

"No, I mean just what I say," I asserted. "You and I are going to eat and then eat some more. By God, we'll never stop eating the way I feel now. Look at this, Ed; feast your eyes upon it, behold

it, behold more wealth than you and I ever had or ever will have."

"Where did you get that money, Donn?" he queried, his voice trembling. "Well, I'll be darned if it isn't the real thing."

"See yonder Jap restaurant, Ed? Meals for fifteen cents the sign reads. Well, we'll order the biggest meals they've got and after that we'll go out and conquer the world."

Enough food and tobacco to last at least a week were purchased, also overalls for Ed and second-hand shoes which changed my painful experience as a semibarefoot boy into a state of almost unbelievable comfort. Still, after all this spending, I had a little over a dollar left, more than enough to buy a job for one—I had Ed in mind for that.

The day had more in store for us. Chinese lotteries were being operated openly, and we decided to mark a ten-cent ticket. This adventure in gambling resulted in winning the tremendous fortune of one dollar and thirty-seven cents. Why the thirty-seven cents, I did not find out, but I shall never forget the magic romance of just that amount. We also had sense enough to discontinue gambling. Few, if any, in that wealthy city could have felt richer that night than the two guests it had first received with such inhospitality.

The coming night was expected to be the occasion of enjoying a luxury long denied us, and with this in view one of us registered at a lodging house

and for twenty-five cents obtained possession of a small enclosure—not a room—with a very narrow single bed, this time, however, intended to serve us both. This was, of course, accomplished without the knowledge and consent of the hotel-keeper.

So came the curtain of night after the performance of one act in our tragi-comedy. To the tired but happy *dramatis personae* it seemed the dawn of a new and better era.

4

ANY mail?"

The quick-eyed but impassive-mannered hotel clerk looked and found a letter. It was from home. Family news was the usual. My parents were happy over the fact that I enjoyed good health, had found things interesting in America, had traveled and learned—comments inspired by and in response to my last letter. It puzzled my father that with all my acquired qualifications for clerical and professional work I should find it necessary to engage in manual labor. I never intended to disturb him by telling the truth; I owed him the courtesy of deception in certain matters pertaining to my new career.

Grand Hotel Royal, the place with such a slanderously proud and deceptive name where we stayed when in funds, faced Washington Street in the downtown section of Seattle. I rather liked it, especially because of the fact that the rooms were so full of fleas that all other and more objectionable insects must have been crowded out. And fleas

never bothered me as long as I shared the bed with Ed. My partner had resigned himself to these conditions with the practical view that it could have been worse and certainly not much cheaper. To rub it in rather than to sympathize, I told my friend that this preference shown by the fleas certainly proved their excellent taste.

Washington Street, at least near the waterfront, is Seattle's beach for human driftwood. I found it so even if I had not yet been thrown high enough up to remain there for keeps. From our window on the first floor I had a close-up view of the ever-moving procession on the teeming sidewalks. It had a special element of interest to me because of the aspect of frankness and finality most of the passing characters conveyed. There were but few masques of stylish apparel, of careful make-up, of modern, leveling make-belief. These were proletarians, true to their innate characteristics even here in a land that has disclaimed their existence, the same as I had seen them in London and Berlin, most of them just as shabby, gaunt-faced, and hungry-looking. And now when they had come so near and I was one myself, I had become more interested.

Across the street in a narrow cigar stand pressed by a large saloon on one side and a theatre on the other, a young girl ruled with the sceptre of easy smiles and inviting mannerism. She looked every bit the embodiment of vivacity and frivolity she

must have been. She was pretty in her own rights, despite rouge, lipstick, and other beauty aids used with barbarian taste. This girl was exactly what I needed as a substitute for flesh and blood in my erotic dreams. Judging by the general appearance of her many admirers, I knew that I would have had less chance than a "snowball in hell" as Ed expressed it when we once discussed the possibility of winning her favor. We were both safe in this respect, but nothing in the world could hinder me from placing her in my world of fancy. This I did. And while I musingly viewed my fair object between half-shut eyes—as was my habit—I wandered away from the din and chatter of the street, rose above its grey tedium, and a girl I had once met in Canada came back to play her unfinished role of romance. There was only a slight resemblance, to be true, but my imagination seldom failed me in such matters. They both had dark hair, with curls and lustre, dark eyes that could gleam and glow. That was more than enough to blend their identities into one fitting my memory and longing.

With the window open, the air clear after a sudden shower, and the setting sun focused like a searchlight on the open shop, the stage was set for my rendezvous. My last glimpse of Ed had assured me that until again sober I could not expect to see a great deal of him. I hoped, however, that he would return before bedtime.

Now a year and a few days had passed since leaving home. How easy to journey back! A year ago was like yesterday. The girl I had in Winnipeg was now across the street; I had willed her there with the aid of a dream and I was making it more real merely by closing my eyes until I gazed through a slit that shut out everything but what I wanted to see. I was dreaming—so was Ed. We were both stealing pleasure and happiness born of pain. His a headache, mine the blues. But it was worth it. Tedium and longing meant whiskey to him, a dream to me: we knew no other means of warding off despair. I never could blame him even if he stubbornly refused to understand me.

The girl across the street and the girl I had loved and left in Winnipeg were emotional synonyms for a story of my heart. How straight she carried her slim body, how bold and sure of herself she looked—and her full breasts stood out with breath-taking clearness through the thin, low-necked blouse even to me, to the stranger gazing at her across a narrow street now wider than the whole world. The sudden thought, the mad wish to touch them, crush them in an embrace, sent my heart a-racing, flung my hands tightly against my chest; yes, Freud was right! Life must be for something—and as an individual segment of a growing race it must be for this, this one thing that must be answered and satisfied, or nature would punish with a cruelty almost fiendish in its unrelenting application. I

was beginning to learn something about its ruthless laws.

One year gone. First in Duluth. The sweetness of the new and the strange, the bitterness of broken idols, torn illusions . . . Two contrasts: Ed, practical, unemotional, heartless in everything pertaining to affairs of the heart; I, awkward, unskilled, educated, and burning with romantic aspirations but pathetically unfit for everything practical. Well, I learned slowly and painfully—and comically! At least I inspired comedy and now I knew better why. I could laugh at myself even as I once laughed at Ed when his career as a painter ended by giving a tall chimney two coats of paint when it shouldn't have had any. Fate willed it, or it just so happened that we were both fired the same day. A few hours later we left Duluth, relatives, and sundry unpaid bills. Then followed the droll life on a farm in Dakota, then on to Canada, and the first snowflakes of the season were falling when we at last wound up in Winnipeg.

This city fascinated us, and we decided to settle down. But we failed at carpenter-work, concrete-mixing, coal-shoveling, and numerous other forms of manual labor, failed at everything. Still, no matter how grim life proved to be, it now seemed merely as the travail with the birth of that one memory which the girl across the street had again brought out with the startling vividness of a living thing.

She was beautiful—even Ed admitted that without any qualifications—and she really had the very essence of that exotic appeal one generally attributes to fair daughters of the sunny South. There was something subtle and undefinable, yet infinitely perfect and exquisite about her. At first I almost revolted against it and I sought for flaws but all I could find was that her hands were red and poorly kept—a goddess in a kitchen! A high forehead under curly, jet-black hair, nose, mouth, chin sculptured with the softest, gentlest lines. She resembled a statue by Thorvaldsen—and so did the girl in the cigar stand across the street. And like the one painted red and pink and black, so was the girl I first saw at a Salvation Army meeting in Winnipeg—but the likeness was without any aid of make-up. I lost my head and heart at the first glance. Her eyes met mine, and from then on I put into their depth the fairest and wildest of my dreams.

Revival meetings have much in common with the stage. Regardless of creed, they have always fascinated me with their marvelous scenes of unrestrained and naïve emotions. I never found any as well and sensibly conducted as by the Salvation Army, this powerful and sincere friend of the lowly, homeless, and heartsick. Without my rather sophisticated education and my ever-present sceptic other self, I might have enlisted; in fact, I came very near doing it on two occasions. Once I was

so close, felt it so fervently that my tongue tried to form the words of a prayer so that I could take the step, could submit to that gentle urge which dwells in every human heart.

Love finds a way. I noticed that the policeman on the beat talked to this girl after the meeting. A mutual friend, an introduction, another revival meeting, and I escorted her home. All my pent-up longing and every starved emotion now came to my lips as I painted a word picture of myself, of everything I aspired to do and to be—all leading up to a confession of love. It was a cool, crisp winter night with many twinkling stars to help the enchantment, and before I realized how it all came about we had promised forever and ever. . . . On this unforgettable night I learned what I had never known, learned that the supreme height of happiness borders on pain, on its own extreme antithesis. While her heart was beating wildly against mine and her body came closer and closer in the abandon of our throbbing desires, I suddenly shrank from taking more, fearing that I could not endure a happiness greater than what I already possessed. Even words would have been discordant during this symphony of love. Gently I released her and I looked down into her misty eyes. They were sad and troubled, but I also read in them that she would surrender everything a woman has for the man she loves.

It was the same old story: I was broke and could

not hold any of the many jobs I tried. Desperate, I gave in to Ed's suggestion to go West. It so happened that we had an opportunity to join a crew of railroad workers less than an hour before the train was to leave. I had no time to tell her, no way of reaching her. I scribbled a note and promised to return in a few months. Still I felt like a contemptible traitor to the girl who had given me so much and I suffered incessant pangs of remorse during that long trip to Alberta. And I could never forget. I never ceased to love her, although she was now more of a creation of fancy, something of a standard or ideal I had set for the woman I someday hoped to marry. And despite everything, I was sure that she must have thought kindly of me, that she must have been grateful, as I was, for a memory never marred by anything, not even by myself.

Quickly, and with a little start as if aroused from deeper slumber than that of a wakeful dream, I rose when my friend's familiar footsteps were heard in the aisle. Heavier and more unsteady than usual, they told what I already knew. Familiarity with so many forms of intoxication had rendered me immune to reactions; I hardly ever gave it any thought, no matter who was involved. I used to wonder why people drank; now I was more inclined to wonder why they did not. Ed was happy. He had a right to happiness the same as I had through other means. Before my rather top-heavy

partner had opened the door, the thought that I was assured of a peaceful night without the aid of any insecticide, had already flashed through my mind.

"Sneaked away, didn't you?" he blustered out. "And left your partner to drink up all the liquor. Well, I did. Had a good time and borrowed five dollars, too, so you see we don't have to starve for another week. Not so bad. Oh! Here's your half of it, but don't forget to pay it back."

"To whom—who did you borrow it from?" I asked, looking in a trance at the elusive silver coins now glistening in the palm of my hand.

"Never mind," he retorted. "I don't remember, and neither does he, I'm sure. But who do you think I ran into? Our old section boss on C. P. R. and that fellow who was always with him, the one with all the gold in his mouth!"

"Remember—sure I do—how could I forget?"

A chunky, reserved little bit of humanity, but tough, hard, dynamic, and as ruthless a man as I had ever met. He certainly had a superiority complex. To him we were all a bunch of insignificant foreigners, born to be worked, cursed, and driven, and he was a proud Yankee, born to the purple toga of democracy. Most of his men were swarthy, clannish, and tricky, to be sure, but despite the consideration he showed me I could not forgive him his arrogance, his ruthless greed and ignorance. He was typical of everything I was learning to

hate and despise in industrial America; yes, I remembered him.

Ed had been talking while I meditated, and when I caught up with the rather blurred flow of words in his story, he was saying:

“ . . . and we had several drinks together down at Mac’s place. They both looked shabby, and I bet that next time we meet O’Connor the gold will be gone from his teeth. What are you doing? Looking at that girl across the street again? By the way, I stopped and bought cigarettes from her. She sure keeps some flashy fellows sticking around —look like pimps to me.”

“Maybe you are right, Ed,” I commented. “Everything is a matter of conjecture—even what you see and hear. Doesn’t she look like . . . ”

Interrupting me as he walked over to the window, he finished my oft-repeated observation:

“ . . . like the Salvation Army girl.”

Despite my vehement protests to the contrary, he always insisted on making her a member of that organization.

“Not as good-looking, though,” he qualified.

Ed sat down on the wide window sill and joined me in my lazy vigil. We both liked to watch people. I have always felt capable of being more objective as I watch or mingle with the sidewalk procession on a busy street, more able to escape myself and my irritating introspective views. One cannot single out and hold any certain object in a

moving crowd for so long that it obscures one's vision with its individual characteristics. There is no leading man, no heroine—man and woman are as they are in a collective sense, more colorful, more complex, and less controversial than any single individual. Still every passer-by could add something to the sum of my own being: impressions too vague to record, infinitesimal grains of knowledge held together and moulded by man's eternal curiosity in man. I was now viewing my most interesting and brutally realistic sidewalk shows in America; the most animated and romantic I had once seen in Italy. Uneventful and tedious as our life had been of late, it was but natural that I picked out resemblances—wishing for what could have been—in this parade below our window. With a keen little thrill I noticed that the girl had returned to her stand after a short absence.

My friend was in an unusually quiet mood for his advanced state of intoxication. His was not the habit of dreaming, and I could not imagine him engaged in meditations of the kind that I liked. Unless he had fallen in love—somehow I could not picture him even in that normal state. His affairs with the gentler sex always had a most unromantic aspect of short duration, ending with stark finality and without any scruples. I watched him as he sat in a cloud of cigarette smoke. But for his open eyes he might have been asleep. He had a fine profile, a bit too masculine, perhaps, and the brow was

rather low, yet there was a firmness and frankness moulded into almost classic features; no wonder women looked at him admiringly. He carried himself proudly erect and with a sort of physical dignity which might have looked arrogant and affected but for the natural grace of his athletic body. He looked well dressed in both overalls and tailor-made clothes. Ed otherwise escaped delineation. Intellectually he was mediocre in the full meaning of that word, and the most searching character analysis could not possibly have revealed anything but the bare facts of a simple, primitive mind in narrow dimensions. Within that sphere he lived a whole lot better—or at least more comfortably—than I did. His were no philosophical problems and very few ethical ones—no disturbances except those occasionally aroused by basic emotions and physical problems. A few early attempts on my part to attribute any deeper meaning to some of his acts or utterances were such dismal failures that I never tried again, no matter how enigmatic he might appear. I liked him. His personality was never disturbing. He had no mental complexes, so our problems of companionship were few and simple. His swaggering self-assurance, coupled with inconsideration and rough sarcasm, often made me see red, but we never came to more than verbal blows. With this calm attitude toward life, which rendered him immune to my mental upheavals, his very presence often helped me to regain my

composure. This was my trusted friend Ed, now dreaming, or just thinking of nothing, in a happy alcoholic trance.

Ed interrupted my thoughts.

"Never told you, but the other girl we met at that revival meeting in Winnipeg, the one I took home, was a married woman. Not much for looks, but, oh, boy!"

Again back to his silent reveries. Now I knew whither his thoughts were tending, and I could not resist a pertinent comment:

"I see. In other words her married state made her—what shall I say—less reluctant about the usual finale in your love-making. Am I right?"

"Yeah," drawled Ed, "but I could say it much better with words that anybody can understand."

Friendly little insinuations, these, but we both enjoyed them.

"Guess I'll hit the hay; it's about time. How about you?" I asked, beginning to undress. Before he answered I remarked: "Gee, I'm getting sick of this loafing, this waiting and bumming around. I know a Latin saying that fits our case like a glove: '*Otium sine....*'"

These two words were enough to arouse my lethargic roommate. Springing to his feet he shouted:

"Shut up."

Not being in a mood to argue, I complied. If there was anything he disliked it certainly was

quotations. Frequently I used them on purpose, but this time I had not thought of his aversion.

"Spring any more of that on me, and I'll throw this spittoon in your face," Ed exclaimed so forcefully that I instinctively ducked.

"All right, all right, have it your own way, but spittoon or no spittoon, you are going to hear it in English: 'Leisure without dignity'; yes, and without a hell of a lot of other things too."

Ed returned to the window where he remained while I finished undressing. Suddenly he turned and motioned me to come over.

"Come quick and look. See those men? I've been watching them, and they are up to something. Detectives, I bet you. And there comes another cop. He's sure in a hurry."

Standing under the brightly lighted marquee of the theatre, we could see them as plainly as if they had been only a few feet away. The uniformed policeman stopped and talked to the men without the usual preliminaries of a greeting, so there was hardly any doubt that they were all minions of the law. Their tense, almost stealthy manners promised something of interest to happen, and it held us both in silent suspense. We did not have to wait long. As if in response to a command, two of them turned around, whipped out their guns, and ran up to the cigar stand. Before the young man talking to the girl had a chance to notice their approach, he was seized from behind and held by

one detective, while the other snapped on handcuffs. This was exciting enough, but we could hardly believe our own eyes when they also proceeded to arrest the girl. She let out a yell that rent the air and sent people from the whole block running up to the scene. She continued screaming, kicking, and scratching until I thought the officers would have to send for reinforcements before they could take her into custody. Bewildered and aroused to a pitch of excitement and pity, I felt like shouting a protest when I saw how brutally they treated her. For all of her folly or guilt she was a woman, young and pretty, and entitled to consideration. After a blow over the head she lay limp and quiet in the arms of the man who had delivered it. The crowd was strangely hushed, but a murmur soon came and grew into the raucous discord which is the voice of the mob. A siren screamed, and then a large black automobile drew up to finish the brief city drama we had chanced to witness. And when it left, and the siren died in the distance like the wailing howl of a malamute, I felt as if something had gone out of my life.

Morning came. Ed claimed that I had not slept very well, and I knew that my bedfellow had by no means enjoyed undisturbed slumber himself. We were both upset, so much, in fact, that we did not care to discuss the matter. The morning papers contained nothing about the affair. A timid inquiry at the cigar stand was rebuffed with a sharp:

"What the hell is that to you? Mind your own business."

Well, I could not, and neither could Ed. We had both linked that girl to our own lives and we could not discharge it as a closed incident. Later in the afternoon when a few drinks had loosened our tongues we discussed it at length, and finally I suggested that we go over to Police Headquarters and inquire there. Ed first objected, but after a little persuasion I won him over, and we steered our steps toward Yesler Way and the big building which also houses the city jail. Before entering, however, Ed suffered an attack of faint heart, and he stubbornly refused to accompany me. After an ironic remark, which was without effect, I went in, looked at a confusing number of names and titles on the many doors, selected the most likely one, and without asking or waiting I found myself standing before a stern dignitary occupying a large desk on which there was a brass plate reading: Captain of Police.

Every time it was necessary to face some prominent or important man I always experienced a rush of thoughts accusing me of losing the self-assurance and poise I had possessed in a fair degree but a few years ago. And I hated myself for stammering so incoherently my mission to this man, who, no matter what position, was only a public servant. Still I must have made it plain, because he removed his glasses and permitted a

smile to soften his preoccupied and rather frowning countenance.

"A bit unusual, to be sure, but it sounds all right," he said after gazing at me in a frankly appraising manner for several unpleasantly long moments.

"Irregular, too, considering your legally disinterested status, but I'll make an exception for once. Come, take this chair—closer. And now remember, young man, I'm telling you this for your own good, so listen carefully."

Intently as if my very life depended upon hearing every word I listened to his terse but graphic story. While talking he repeatedly tapped the desk with his pencil. He spoke with a peculiar rhythmic diction, and the pencil fell with the quick regular tempo of his story. Even the words sounded as if chosen to fit the weave of a grim tale; they were like talons clutching and tearing at my heart. Soon I forgot who the narrator was, forgot the place, forgot myself as I interjected in a violent outburst of pity and disgust:

"...no, God, no, it can't be true! She's so young, so fine-looking...."

"Well, I've answered your question, son," he said after concluding his sordid drama of the street. "Now save your sympathy and interest until someone more worthy comes along. After you have seen a little more of life in the raw you'll understand women better—and trust them less. They always

take more than they give—always—except, perhaps, to their own children.”

There was a friendly gleam of pity in his grey eyes, and it looked odd on such a hard face. Lost in a confusion of clashing thoughts, I thanked him, shook the offered hand, and left.

“What did you find out?” queried Ed.

“Nothing,” I heard myself answer in a tone of voice that did not sound like my own.

“Took you a hell of a long time to discover that much,” was his gently ironic rejoinder.

“Yes—nothing!”

And that was all I ever told him.

5

AFTER all, I asked myself, can it be such a curse to be sensitive, analytical, inclined to look at things from a sort of inward angle, curious, skeptic, but still responsive to every shade and nuance of thoughts and emotions? Life seems to have a more or less fixed proportion of good and bad, of beauty and ugliness, of sober and drunken moments. Those who see more, find a fuller measure of both sorrow and happiness, consequently life becomes richer, less neutral, less tedious, a more colorful and eventful cavalcade. The cup is always overflowing, never empty.

"Donn," said Ed, "why don't you snap out of it and try to be like the rest of us. Forget this reading and writing and dreaming; it will get you nowhere. You're in America now—no room or time for old country snobs and intellectuals here."

Words to that effect were frequently ventured by my friend in his comments on the folly and peculiarity of my ways. It was waste of effort, I knew, to defend myself, but I was always ready

for arguments, feeling that it helped to strengthen me. Many of my suppositions were of a frail nature, and they all needed to be tested and tried. I could no more stop meditating than Ed could stop being his own physically active but intellectually vacant self.

Exceptions to the contrary, man is by nature idealistic, born to yearn for stars, ordained to pursue a course of progress in answer to an instinctive urge. Nature has also decreed in a seemingly incongruous manner that we shall be almost fatally handicapped in our race for every goal. Selfishness, intolerance, diseases of mind and body, exist to frustrate and enfeeble every effort to make the world a better place to live. Bitter and cruel and hating, man usually crucifies those he should follow and worship. And anyone who is individual, select, and qualified is often trampled and crushed because he dares to be different than the general run of the mob. Still mankind surges forward and backward, like ebb and tide, building, destroying, changing. Who can help pondering over these things, help striving to place one's life where it fits into the Great Scheme, help trying to find a meaning and mission to live for?

This was the gist of what I told Ed innumerable times and to his growing disgust. Finally he did not even bother to listen. But I kept it up as a convenient form of soliloquizing; I just had to talk to somebody.

Unable to find work in Seattle, we hit the trail for the Cascade Mountains and the country east. Almost every day of tramping, every new job, every adventure in stark realism brought us nearer despair. I soon found it easy to doubt, easy to say: "I don't care," or "What is the use of trying."

Greed, graft, and favoritism did not even take the trouble of appearing in disguise at a camp where we joined a motley crew of workers engaged in the task of patching up an old and dilapidated branch line of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Disgusted with the rotten food and the hard labor, I was ready to quit the first day. One of the foremen drove and cursed us incessantly while at work. Once when I happened to be his target I felt like springing at him, but realizing that it might mean something similar to attempting suicide, I managed to control myself. Later that same day I met him while bathing in a near-by river, and to my surprise he proved to be an unusually congenial and well-educated chap. From him we learned that the foremen were splitting commissions with several employment offices. That accounted for the steady stream of laborers coming and going. Men were fired upon the merest pretext, and the abusive treatment caused many to quit. As a result of congenial relations with our new acquaintance we enjoyed immunity, although it did not improve our pay or working conditions.

I was now beginning to realize why most work-

ingmen who think are so radical. One by one, and by no means painlessly, I discarded many of my social theories. And still they had long been mine, with all the strength of preconceived ideas imparted by biased education and class prejudice. Even in the promised land of democracy I found that idealism is never practiced as it is preached. The hypocrisy and cruel greed permeating the whole social structure was a startling discovery. Fear was ruling everybody around me, as it did me, varying only in degree. Torn by conflicting thoughts, I tried to fight off what threatened to destroy my hopes, knowing only too well that indifference and disillusion would end what I aspired to attain. . . .

To rise above fear, so I reasoned, would be to become an aristocrat in fact. And only a patrician of courage and character can be truly democratic. His caste would be derived from his attitude of mind, and he would rule because he was supremely qualified, not merely born or elected to govern. He would fear nothing, be it conventions, opinions, poverty, or even ostracism. Proudly he would walk apart from the milling, crawling masses, and with the iron will of a dictator save it from itself—from mob rule!

There remained very little self-esteem after reflecting over the fact that a leader should possess nearly everything I lacked, despite a long line of

gentle ancestry. I was born to fear, cut out for the role of a plebeian—just like one of the mob.

Somehow, several long and droll days rolled by, and one morning when the sheer loveliness of cool air and dazzling sunshine could have made anyone a gypsy, we decided that it was time to hit the trail . . . and so we went our way, beating trains, bumming rides, and hiking, mostly hiking. A week later found us stranded and penniless in a fair city of orchards on the upper Columbia River. It had been difficult to get there, but it proved still more difficult to leave, in spite of the fact that we had been officially notified to do so. The dent of a policeman's heavy shoes was now, a few hours later, a blue, bulging, and extremely sore spot on my hip. Ed and I had been caught in a roundup of tramps as they called them: men eagerly, willingly looking for work would be my description. Although too swift for the clumsy policemen, we had not managed to escape a few blows and kicks in our mad scramble to get away. Without money and not even the prospect of a job, we had no other choice but to leave.

Heat, distance, and poor roads made walking the last resort. Beating a freight seemed our best chance. Ordinarily that would not have appeared so difficult to accomplish, but here it was different because the railroad did not permit this mode of traveling and had assigned special guards on every

train. We were told that pilfering of freight was the reason for this—to us—embarrassing condition.

Another phase of nature's spectacle of eternal flux was now taking place. Autumn had been ushered in with a riot of color, with days of breathtaking beauty and nights of profound depth and infinite mystery. And while the evening was young and the air still trembling and flowing in waves over the sun-scorched ground, Ed left to look over the railroad yard. Presently he returned with the good news that a long fruit train was scheduled to leave for the Pacific Coast shortly before midnight. The railroad employee who had supplied the information had also assured him that there would be no guards on this train—only the regular crew.

Expectant hours went fast this time, almost too fast, I thought, for in spite of all my experience, I dreaded the very thought of beating this freight. The railroad had a hard name, and I had an unshakable feeling that this reputation might be strengthened by our case. The night was sultry and unusually dark, but toward midnight the moon rose behind the mountains, and we could see well enough to permit perfect freedom of movements. We took up our post in an orchard near the track and at a place where a slight incline assured us that no train pulling out from the yard could yet have gained much speed. Ed had assumed the leadership, and he ordered me around in

a manner that showed he had the situation well in hand. Finally two signals indicating a departing train cut through the silence and sent cold shivers up and down my back. After that I was oblivious of everything but our immediate problem. I was not even scared; at least I never gave it another thought. Before the answering echoes had died, we were up and running toward the track. We had fastened our bundles very securely and mine felt lighter than first expected. Crouching behind a low brush, we waited the approach of the spitting, hissing locomotive. My heart was beating like a hammer against my ribs, and I could hear Ed's heavy, labored breathing.

Since the train had started we had not exchanged a word. Every little detail had been thoroughly discussed before. Most important was to act both independently and together when the right time came. We did not expect to be able to board the same car, but one of us might catch the rear end of one car and the other the front of the next one. My hands were trembling and they plucked nervously at my shirt, then closed into tight fists, remembering only too well how it felt to catch a train on the fly and to hold on for dear life. The giant eye of the approaching monster now laboring up the slope was throwing a blinding beam of light at us, moving swiftly and dancing with weird shadows of trees and brush. The rails glowed and glimmered, and sparks in the thick

smoke rose and fell in splendid cascades. Though safe enough, we drew back several feet when the engine rushed by with a deafening roar—a moment of indecision and then we were on the run with the train as fast as we could, ready to grab and hold on to one of those protruding bars which serve as ladders at the ends of boxcars. Car upon car passed. Finally Ed shouted to jump. With both hands I seized a steel bar, and after a painful jerk my body swung out and then slapped back against the car. After climbing higher, I found myself lodged safely but uncomfortably on the shaking and rolling train. After some anxious moments of concern, my partner descended from above. He had caught the end of the next car.

"Gee, we were lucky," he shouted into my ear. "Didn't think we were going to make it; the train was going too damn fast."

He was right, but I had not realized it until now. We had succeeded by such a small margin: a little more speed or a little less strength in our hands and we might have been actors in a tragedy on this highway of steel.

Hours, or rather ages, later when we arrived at an important railroad junction near the coast, we both promised never to ride another freight. It would have been too risky a venture to continue farther, and, besides, our aching arms and cramped bodies could not have endured it much longer. So when the train slowed down and passed over

switches and crossings with hammering clicks, I selected what looked like a soft spot on a sandy bank and jumped forward closely followed by Ed. Rolling and skidding to a sudden stop in a dry ditch, we entered in true vagabond manner another unknown city. Our stay proved of short duration, and, resolutions to the contrary, we returned to Seattle—this time on a north-bound freight.

"Time certainly flies," was my friend Ed's comment one evening when we happened to be dwelling on that ethereal thing by which man tries to measure the pace of events.

"No," I contradicted, "time stays; we go. But I wonder where?"

6

WITH the aid of a casual acquaintance my partner managed to secure employment in a logging camp. I tried but was turned down so it became necessary to part for a while. Before completely penniless, I decided to try the labor mart of Tacoma. As I was leaving the ticket window in the Ferry Building, a young and quite attractive woman, leading a little girl five or six years of age, walked up and addressed me:

"Pardon me, sir, but may I ask if you are going to Tacoma?"

Startled, I hesitated a moment before acknowledging a rather self-evident fact.

"I wish you would take care of my girl on the ferry," she asked, surveying me keenly with grave but friendly eyes. "Don't mind telling you that I feel I can trust you. I'll make it right with you, and you don't have to worry about little Anne-Marie—she's a good girl. Relatives will meet her in Tacoma. Will you do this for me?"

I was not only surprised but also amused at the

train of thoughts which rushed through my mind while she was talking. It would have been interesting to know just what she thought of me. My self-evaluation was certainly not influenced by arrogance or deception—only a casual look at myself when passing a mirror or a store window sent chills up and down my spine. Ill-fitting and soiled overalls, shoes even beyond a normal stage of discard and the hat I now turned and twisted in a manner revealing my discomfort harmonized in every respect with my vagabond apparel.

Unable for a moment to assume control over my confused mind, I stammered an awkward acceptance of this novel responsibility, expressing my gratitude for being trusted, but firmly declining any compensation.

Had she but known the low ebb of my resources, my proud refusal might not have stopped her from insisting that I take the folded bill she tried to thrust into my hand. My reward was more than enough, however, because she had given me back a bit of something I had lost and had made me realize that clothes do not mean everything to some people. The mere fact of her confidence in me shattered much of the bitterness I had of late developed.

A cold wind was blowing out on Puget Sound, so I deemed it advisable to take my protégée into one of the comfortable lounges. The curiosity we aroused was so evident and so unkind, if I read the

many staring eyes correctly, that I soon left the girl alone but where I could watch her through a convenient window. Sensible beyond her years, she accepted my explanation, and we carried on a silent flirtation consisting of friendly exchanges of smiles and nods which kindled a glow no west wind could ever cool.

A well-dressed little girl at the hand of a rather rough-looking laborer caused a policewoman, who was watching the arriving passengers at Tacoma, to stare at me with unmistakable interest. We were still on the gang-plank when a man and a woman broke through the crowd and welcomed the little girl. Hurriedly I bid goodbye, leaving my little friend to explain more explicitly.

Due to the deep impression it left, this unexpected interlude had more significance than many recent happenings. It inspired self-confidence, it encouraged and cheered me; perhaps I had not yet descended too low for recognition of some less apparent qualities. My droll adventure in kindness and trust followed me up the wide main street of Tacoma. I felt strangely contented as I walked on, lost in meditations which took me far away from the rush and noise of this dreary town... and I was still holding the hand of the little fairy who had been mine for a precious fragment of space and time.

After registering at a cheap hotel, I went over to the office of a large sawmill and applied for a

job. To my surprise I was hired and assigned to the night shift as a yard laborer, work to commence next Monday, this being a Saturday. The privilege to eat and sleep at a company-operated boarding house was also extended. One half of my last dollar had been invested in lodging. The remainder would provide for another meal or two, and merely the assurance of having my immediate needs taken care of was a source of unwonted pleasure.

My decision to postpone moving over to the boarding house until the following day eventually proved to be the undoing of my sawmill career in Tacoma. My room in the "Jap" Hotel was without windows and resembled a large closet. Ventilation was furnished through a large opening near the ceiling. Through it I could hear everything going on in the adjoining room, and one can easily imagine what that meant to my state of mind when the occupant happened to be a prostitute plying her infamous trade. Evidently aware of my presence, she once inquired if I wanted a drink or a cigarette. I admitted that a cigarette would be acceptable, especially because she had been the cause of a bad case of nerves. A whole package came flying through the opening, and I proceeded to smoke furiously until sleep finally came and released my fettered mind. So far so good, but when I woke up after a short, tortuous sleep and felt lice crawling, stinging, biting until my whole body itched and burned, then I broke down and

cried in despair and disgust. The vexing realization of being unclean was an old and often repeated experience, although still something which grew in horror every time. Frantically, like one possessed, I tried to rid myself of the savage insects, using every available means, including a bath which took my last penny, but everything proved of no avail. All I could hope to accomplish until wealthy enough to buy some new clothes was to keep the number under control.

The sequence—or rather the climax—to this occurrence came a few days later when I was handed a note requesting my presence at the office of the mill superintendent. Brusquely, this powerful dignitary gave me a check, stating in extremely direct words that my discharge was due to the fact that my bed at the hotel had been found infested with a particularly obnoxious kind of lice called greybacks.

There have been but few occasions in my life when I have felt more humiliated, and I shall never forget the utter contempt in the wide, fixed eyes of a very attractive girl, evidently a stenographer, who had joined others in staring at me as if I represented something low, vulgar, and abject—something unclean and alien.

With my head in a whirl and sick at heart I walked for hours up and down the streets. And I heard myself mutter the gist of my thoughts:

"What the hell is the use of trying—what the hell. . . ."

When I cashed my pay check I noticed that a substantial sum had been deducted, no doubt for disinfecting the room. In view of the fact that this incident made me feel so gloomy and desperate, it has always seemed paradoxical that I bought clothes instead of liquor with my money.

Broke but clean, I continued the same treadmill search for work. Another young tramp threw his lot with me, and it happened that our first joint attempt was successful. After two days of brooding thoughts and unbroken fasting, I and my new partner commenced to work in a large powder and ammunition plant. Everything went well for nearly a week, and I was beginning to nourish a newborn hope of success, when we were both unexpectedly discharged. When again back in Tacoma, my partner went on a drunk, spent most of his meager earnings, and presently we were both broke.

Work was reputed to be plentiful, although we certainly did not find it so, probably due to our limited qualifications. My partner's fondness for liquor proved to be of practical assistance in securing food. He had an intuitive ability to find ways and means to satisfy his craving and a treat to drink occasionally included a meal for us both. I also drank more than was good for me.

The effeminate appearance of my friend Swan

belied his true character. He was young and well educated, but had tasted vice in many forms and seemed destined to descend quickly into a state of moral degeneracy. Liquor was not the cause but the means of carrying out nature's own sentence—Swan was also born to his fate.

One day when thoroughly disgusted with his drunken antics, I left him, climbed a steep side street, and then strolled down one of Tacoma's leading business arteries. My overalls were new and clean, but I was uncomfortably conscious of my shoes, which were much too large and of the special kind worn by laborers around powder factories. A size or two larger and Charlie Chaplin could have used my footwear for his classic make-up. More than one passer-by eyed me with a smile. As I turned a corner, intending to return to a less fastidious section, a little girl broke away from a young couple and rushed into my arms. It was my protégée from the ferry. My voice grew husky, and I felt myself swept away by uncontrollable feelings, felt lost and forsaken and found only a few clumsy and broken words to answer her rapid volley of questions. Had it not been for her firm hold on my hand I would have run away before her escort had had time to come up to us. My shoes seemed to grow in length while I stood before them. Extremely self-conscious, I twisted my cap nervously and longed to be far, far away. And to recall—which I did—that not so very long ago

I used to walk the boulevards of a large metropolis, sure of myself and my destiny, and dressed as a man of fashion with spats and cane and silk hat and . . . oh, hell!

After politely declining an invitation for dinner at their home and also refusing financial assistance, which offer, however, was entirely too insistent to be sincere, I stroked the soft, flushed cheek of my little friend, bowed deeply, turned, and hurriedly departed.

Afterward the thought struck me that a young man with the shoes of a clown and the clothes of a vagabond, bowing as he did in the stiff, formal manner of an Old World gentleman, must have presented quite a striking picture.

7

BROKE again! Ed had left for a logging camp in Canada, and I could not claim one single soul in the big city as a friend, now when I needed one so badly. I felt like a forlorn child who had lost his way, and an acquaintance once remarked that I looked like a kid tramp. My awkward manners and strained, telltale expression of a destitute must have been as an open book to all who chanced to meet and observe me. My pride could not overcome a growing sense of shame and guilt. Timidly I sought the refuge and privacy of the darkest streets I knew, wandered for hours aimlessly through Chinatown and the slums of the harbor district. Desperate and heartbroken after a long search for work, any kind of work, I now had, after several days without food, finally reached the limit of my endurance.

There was fever and despair in the mad dance and violent turmoil of my agonized mind. Pride, true and trusted friend in my hours of need and temptation, was battling and pleading with the

insistent demands of hunger and fatigue. Not even so much as a bite of food for days, and to climax it all I had not known a moment of sleep during the last hellishly long night. How I longed to get away from this cursed city. Later in the afternoon I decided to leave downtown, hoping to find at least a place to sleep out in the more open suburbs.

Throngs of recruits to the seasonal army of unemployed crowded the sidewalks. Employment offices offered only a few poorly paying jobs, such as woodcutting, contracts for land-clearing and a scattering of more skilled professions, all, however, quite unattractive even to those who could qualify. After the usual closing down of most construction camps and other work affected by the winter, thousands were now flocking back to the cities. There was evidence of both plenty and need among this motley lot of homeless creators of wealth—at least surplus wealth—for all but themselves.

Hunger is to us all, through necessity, accident, and even choice, an unavoidable experience. Missing a meal or two is to a healthy person an event which only adds zest to the next one, but when fasting is extended, as it frequently happened to me, over a longer period—one time nearly a week—then one learns to know the terror of real hunger.

With hunger I always experienced a peculiar sensation of feeling freer, less hampered by normal restraint. The mind seemed to function as if disassociated from the body. Thoughts and memories,

clear but unconnected and torn, rushed through my mind with feverish speed. A few nights ago while accompanying a philandering acquaintance I had met an unusually attractive and friendly woman although one not acceptable in what is called the best of society. Looking at me with startled eyes she had exclaimed, quite agitated, that she had seen me before and under circumstances which had etched an indelible picture of me in her memory. With the unconventional frankness of one living a brutally frank life she told that she had seen my ragged and hunger-marked self on the streets of a Canadian city, and that pity and interest had prompted her to follow me several blocks.

"God, what a hungry look there was in your eyes, Kid—I'll never forget it!" she had exclaimed, carried away by the vividness of her recollections. Some forbidding aspect of pride and reserve about me had held her back. Well, she did not know that this was a proud fool's way of declining what he needed but would never accept as charity. And she could not have known that it was also the self-defense of a dreamer who feared to be exposed and ridiculed. Even if grateful, I could not help but feel that it was better for both concerned that the courtesan had not helped the vagabond. He was too young to know, and she was too fair to look upon; her's was a flame to burn, not to warm and comfort.

My natural sensitiveness had of late grown morbidly strong, and I became a helpless victim of peculiar moods and idiosyncracies. Much to the surprise of my acquaintances—and to the annoyance of one—my proud reserve was never penetrated, especially when more pronounced by being completely down and out. False, probably, but this same pride to which I was born had also kept my hands from stretching out and my lips from asking for alms. Hungry, yes, but not a beggar; out of work, but never a bum—never! Affected disdain and reticence were features of the masque behind which I was trying to hide my own sentimental self in this mad masquerade where seemingly only the make-up and antics of clowns and hypocrites were approved and compensated.

8

PASSING by a justly ill-reputed hotel, where I had stayed a few days ago, I felt myself shrink almost in horror before the recollection of its nauseating filth even more than before the knowledge that I was about to face another night without shelter. On a cold and foggy winter night, like this one threatened to be, that would also mean without sleep. Still there remained a few precious hours before nightfall, and whatever might happen should be for the better—nothing could be much worse than my present plight.

Single-file, a chain of human links extended from a public employment office more than a whole block down the steep street. I did not join my fellow unfortunates. After several futile attempts I now considered it a waste of even my own rather worthless time. And, besides, I derived no comfort from mingling with others in similar circumstances; being alone had certain compensations of its own. While looking at the men I thought some very bitter thoughts. The greyest of grey is such a

queue seen in the November fog of Puget Sound. It moved slowly, too slowly, it seemed, even for a cold and late afternoon, and it wriggled like an ugly, grey worm. Every vibrating joint was a man, young and old, surplus and waste of the hollow thing called civilization, and nearly all looked their roles of tragedy, looked roughly handled with their shabby clothes, grey complexions and grey glances from listless, tired eyes. Dwarfed and twisted—what kind of souls could be linked to such men?

With a wave of quick contempt I shrugged my shoulders when a policeman eyed me with unconcealed interest. To my embittered mind he represented the unjust social system which denied me what I was entitled to as a birthright. A curse died as it trembled on my lips when I noticed an expression of sympathy on his clean-cut and intelligent face. Perhaps he understood. Youth and dreamers are always loved by those whose hearts and minds are kind and just, beloved even if dressed in rags and smeared by filth from the gutters of slums. . . .

The dull thud of every footstep against the pavement, the rhythmic jarring of my body, effecting a quicker, freer flow of my sluggish blood made constant walking a physical as well as a mental necessity even if it drained what little strength I had left. To stand still or to walk slowly caused an almost unbearable tension. There were many

integrant parts in the composite theme of hunger I had never known before.

Overwhelmed by longing and memories, I lingered outside a large, fashionable hotel, eagerly taking in the tempting sight of comfort, warmth, and plenty offered to anyone possessing the gold I did not have. Indeed, I would have given much for the privilege to tread over the soft carpets in that spacious lobby, to sink deeply into one of those gigantic chairs and vanish in luxurious softness, then to mingle with men of culture and of that exquisite distinction and imperturbable self-assurance which comes with breeding and financial independence which I had once been accustomed to accept as my right by birth.

Out of the many schemes there finally remained but one which appealed to me as feasible, and, under the circumstances, ethical. One source of food had not yet been tried, and after considerable deliberation I decided to attempt the rather risky venture of eating in some saloon without buying the drink which entitled one to the privilege of free lunch.

The only real disastrous effect of being caught would be the violent displeasure of some watchful dispenser of firewater and food. Physically it might prove to be a lasting memory of swiftly and carelessly applied kicks and blows. There was, however, solace in the thought that young and sober legs can usually outdistance those of any

saloonkeeper. Most of the ones I knew were stout, slow, short of breath, and generally degenerated by the meat pots and alcoholic liquids of a land much richer than the proverbial Egypt. My hesitation and qualm were soon submerged by the insistent urge of a craving now holding me in a vicelike grip.

It was getting late. Many stores had closed, and the streets were quieter. Gone was the noisy, trading, and talkative crowd of a few hours ago. There was more both of gloom and of festive mood. Men walked the streets looking homeless and hungry; others were still seeking amusement or were homeward bound.

Reluctant whether or not to favor the place with the doubtful honor of a visit, I stopped outside a large corner saloon. I was beginning to feel faint, weakened as I was, not only by hunger, but also by the terrible mental strain. The streets which crossed here looked like illuminated shafts running through the inky-blue darkness of night, and the sky above was like a heavy pall thrown over the city. Leaning against the wall by the saloon entrance, I watched the passing show. Accompanied by a loud brass band, an intensely sentimental sacred song rose above the noise of the street, carrying a tender, hypnotic appeal, stronger, richer, and more beautiful now in this setting of poverty and discord. Although I had always felt my heart respond to the message of delivery from

bondage of sin and pain, the conduct of these ignorant street missionaries was repulsive to my intelligence and contrary to my conception of religion. It seemed a parody and a farce, especially offensive in view of the fact that their activities were so openly commercialized. Surely Christ would never have sanctioned the antics of these clowns and their impudent appeals for money even if done for a worthy cause in His sacred name. But this evening I did not care, did not reason as was my habit—only felt, and that more deeply, more fervently, than I could endure much longer in silence. A little less restraint, a little more agony, and I would have screamed.

The cool evening breeze of the autumn night stroked my burning brow and cheeks like a gentle hand. The raucous voice of the city was now dying down to a soft murmur of rest and sleep.

The saloon of my choice carried a proud name in golden letters over its wide corner entrance, but as "pride often goeth before a fall," this name "Imperial" had been dragged down into the gutter where it indisputably belonged, and so it happened that "Hell's Corner" was now its fitting and best-known identification. When I hurriedly pushed open the swinging door of this establishment for a last and desperate attempt I collided with a tall, coarse-looking man. A polite "pardon me" stopped him, and he eyed me curiously for what seemed an uncomfortably long time. I expected an explo-

sion of anger, but instead was treated to the surprise of seeing a kind smile spread over his homely features. His hand slapped my shoulder in a rough but cordial manner and then he passed on after making a friendly remark.

One corner was reserved for a lunch counter where free lunch, consisting of small bowls of beans with crackers, were dispensed to qualified patrons. The corner was known as "The Filthy Spoon," but in no way did the unappetizing name detract from its fascination to me. The spicy fragrance of the beans almost nauseated me, so eagerly, so frantically did I desire the food. All fear was now gone and after a few tense moments I found myself standing directly behind a man just being served. Eagerly my hand reached out for the bowl which was being filled with steaming beans, but then a disapproving glance from cold and greedy eyes started the feared debacle.

It all happened so quickly that I felt dazed and bewildered as if struck a sudden blow. From what seemed a far distance I heard how hard and filthy abuse was poured over me by a high-pitched voice which came nearer and nearer as it rose in shrill falsetto, soon drowning all other sounds in the saloon. The man was taking a fiendish delight in hurling the most loathsome and ironic remarks at me while I stood there cringing and staring at him, my angry accuser. Still I hardly heard a word, hardly felt anything but a deep, dull resignation.

I had failed again, failed utterly, and nothing really mattered any more. I did not even care to run away, though I might easily have escaped at least the disgrace of being the center of growing attention from the curious crowd. My swirling head had quieted down. And now there came the calm of mind which seems to follow many a great crisis as nature's own way of righting things.

Even a crowd of my own class can be extremely cruel, I found. Laughter and sneering expressions from several amused spectators accompanied the unbroken outpour from the enraged man. Just as I was about to be thrown out, a tall, giant toiler of forests or mines broke through the ring formed around us and demanded in a forceful, threatening voice to know what was happening to a friend of his. As such he referred to me—to the young, pathetic-looking vagabond, who must have looked like a mere child by his side. Without even waiting for any explanation he shouted a defiance to anybody to dare harm his friend. The instantly cowed saloon-man muttered something unintelligible and then returned to his place behind the counter. The crowd was hushed by the defender's courage and physical might, and everybody must have been even more deeply impressed when he pulled out a roll of currency to further prove his ability to protect.

The scene shifted. Now it was my friend's turn to play the leading role. For a few moments this

unexpected actor held the interest of the audience as a hero of strength and magnanimity, but soon the crowd closed in around us, then scattered, and the playlet just enacted was ended, if not forgotten, as new interests came and went in this swift whirlpool of life.

After a while I began to regain some of my lost composure. It felt good to have a strong arm about my shoulder and to hear kind, encouraging words from a man who had so conclusively proved himself a real friend. He knew and he understood. Then he put something into my hand, and my misty eyes gazed in surprise at a crumpled bill, almost unable to grasp its reality. I protested, declining to accept so much money—any money—but he cut it short by saying:

"Keep it, Kid, you need it worse than I do. Some day you can pay me back. I know how it feels to be broke and hungry, but I'm not so handicapped as you must be in this merry game of making a living—takes a lot of brawn, you know. Have a drink and a meal, then go to bed and by tomorrow you can buy yourself a job. Sorry, Partner, but I'm leaving town tonight—leaving right now—so goodbye and good luck."

The swinging doors opened and closed again. The stars were shining even brighter and the song of the sleepy city sounded much softer. And that night before retiring I knelt by my bed in a sort of a trance rather than in prayer, feeling as happy

as I believe only a child with a faith which does not reason or question can be.

The following day Ed returned, successful to the extent of a small stake, which he generously divided with me. More experienced, and better aware of unromantic realities, I faced a world which I was determined to deal with in a different manner. I wanted above all to get away from the city. An opportunity to leave presented itself a day or two later when we were offered work in a sawmill east of the Cascade Mountains.

I noticed a few harder lines around my mouth and I knew that my eyes could grow cold and show a steely glint of vagabond contempt upon the slightest provocation. I also found that curses were easier to say, fists easier to clench. Evidently we were adapting ourselves to a new mode of living as part of our struggle to exist. But I also discovered that dreamers and fools are slow to learn and hard to change and that life's little wisps of wind never cease to play with them as autumn breezes do with dead, dry leaves.

9

AFTER a brief spell of leisure, we hired out as laborers in a sawmill near a town on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains. At this time another member was added to our partnership. His name was Allen Maclaren. We could not have wished for a better friend, for a more loyal companion than this tall, uncouth and outspoken vagabond of land and sea. He was a born philosopher to whom everything in life had some certain meaning, some positive aspect never obscured by tradition or colored by doctrinal education. Maclaren's truly marvelous faculty of clear and logical reasoning always astonished me, and I envied him the intelligence which had enabled him to acquire so much knowledge without sitting on any schoolbench.

Through Maclaren we became interested in British Columbia and Alaska. He had just returned from Atlin when we met him. After a few days—or was it hours?—we had made up our minds to join him and his partner Sinclair should

they decide to return in the spring. This contemplated trip to Alaska was in our estimation a most momentous undertaking, the promise of a real adventure. Presently it became the one and only interest of paramount importance around which we crowded all our dreams and hopes. The realization of our plan was contingent upon saving enough money for the long trip; there were no highways to tramp, no trains to beat this time. With a new incentive we had become optimistic, and confident of success we proceeded to indulge in pleasant anticipations—to us that alone meant happiness.

Even the droll and commonplace can have an intrinsic element of interest, can reach a climax as a swift and tense drama even if so evasive for description that it remains in one's memory merely as a vague but still unshakable image in the mind. Such was, generally speaking, my inglorious saw-mill career. I had so far never encountered any vocation in which I possibly could have been more of a misfit. Every conscious part of both body and mind reacted with unrelenting violence against the hard, tedious work, the noise, speed, and servility I had encountered in every sawmill and especially in this last one where we were trying to make our road-stake for Alaska. No matter how earnestly I tried to adjust myself, it proved futile to evade or ameliorate the bitter thoughts which ruled me so ruthlessly. During these long days I

never read a book, never made a single entry in my diary, and it was near agony to write a letter. Only when aroused or angered could I engage in any intellectual effort—that is if the rhapsody of my emotional thoughts could be classed as such.

Ed and I shared a small and dark room in the company-owned bunkhouse. A small window and a single electric droplight of few candlepower never conquered the depressing half-light. The bare walls had the grey color of age and dirt. Two iron beds, a few empty boxes serving as chairs, bundles, suitcases, and other personal belongings only helped to increase the gloom and bareness of our room. Sawdust, ashes, and cigarette butts literally covered the floor. After seeing some of the other rooms I realized, however, that the sad condition of ours could be attributed to our own neglect—neither Ed nor I cared for a place we never intended to make our home.

It was the evening after an exceptionally busy day. Looking at Ed as he lay smoking on his bed, the thought struck me that I had never seen good-natured indolence and the hard intolerance of ignorance as plainly revealed as on his handsome face. His eyes met mine in a similarly appraising manner and I wondered what he was thinking of me. After clearing his throat, he raised his head and aimed carefully at a favorite black knot on the floor. The liquid bullet, however, missed its target by several inches. This practice had of late been a source of

considerable irritation, but I was now inclined to admit resignation.

"Do you think I'll ever learn to spit like a real he-man?" he asked with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

My silent but undisguised contempt must have served the purpose of a reply. Evidently well pleased with the result he chuckled, lit another cigarette and continued, this time in a reminiscent vein:

"Gus, the big stiff, was snooping around the yard all day. He was watching me, I know. One of his pets must have told him that I smoke on the job. Well, for once they got a good day's work out of me and the horses. You can be sure that I'll get even tomorrow, though. Wish I had Gus here now so I could practice spitting on him."

Ed puffed angrily at his cigarette and the smoke rose in clouds and rings.

"Guess he's got your number at last," I observed, not without irony. "Better watch your steps—we haven't enough money yet for our trip, you know."

Our self-appointed camp musician had begun his regular evening concert in the lobby. The powerful lungs of his harmonica blared and thundered, filling every nook and corner of the house with crude melody and violent rhythm. The music had lost very little of its volume even after ascending the stairway, floating down the long corridor and entering the closed door to our room. Occasionally

a familiar tune spoke softly with the voice of some associated memory. Then I could forgive and forget the musician—yes, even if his artless playing were only an atrocious compound of noise and melody, because the music was in harmony with my own reminiscent mood—torn, anachronistic, sentimental.

Strange, I thought, how one's mind always seeks and finds some substitute for the emptiness of the present by enabling one to live over the past, taking an incident here and another there to fit the particular mood of the moment. And we were all more or less alike, I had found. With but a small chance of losing, I would have wagered that the men now gathered in the lobby were talking about happenings of their yesterdays, just as Ed and I were. The topic of Alaska was one exception . . . but it was charged with a personal element always controversial unless Maclaren was present. Ed felt that the North was too much of a he-man's country for me and he enjoyed rubbing it in.

"Wonder where Mac is—he should be here by now," Ed said, also voicing my own thoughts.

We were not in the habit of talking about any absent member of our trio, but Maclaren had the interest of the new and unexplored, so Ed and I could not resist the temptation to discuss him. There was always some new angle, some unexpected twist and turn to the mental make-up of our tall and lanky partner. He was different from

the general run, and when he talked one instantly knew that he had something to set him apart. His blue eyes were calm and alert and often cold with something like *hauteur* when the occasion arose, but there were always two brilliant stars of humor in them. And flashes of wit and merriment were his to brighten the dullest moment.

"Mac sure is a nice chap," I said, summarizing my thoughts. "Wish we had met him before. Our partnership needed someone like him to complete it—sort of round it out. I'm not complaining but I know that nature experimented a little when we were conceived. It mixed a bit of everything: put in and took away in order to see what would happen to such a concoction. It made you thick-skinned and unconcerned. I grew up to be a conglomeration of nerves and emotions and—well, I'll let you describe me—you've been training long enough to know how."

"Last night Mac told me about some of his experiences bumming around here in the West," I continued. "You remember that time when we spent several days in a jungle near Everett? Mac said he's been there too. I'll never forget that queer-looking little hobo who could tell such tales, the one who took such a liking to us. He sure gave me the creeps, though."

"Me, too," interjected Ed. "But it was you he liked. Said you were so good-looking. Never seen

you move as quickly as you did when he tried to put his arms around you—the filthy snake!"

Yes, I remembered that evening of autumn glamour and vagabond gloom when a dark-skinned and black-eyed little tramp carrying a heavy sack joined us at the campfire where we were discussing and bewailing shortage of food and work. He seated himself next to me.

"You fellows give me a pain in the neck," he broke in after he had learned the trend of our conversation. "There is always plenty to eat. I never starve and I never work, ha, ha...."

The unfathomable irony, dare, and challenge in his words pierced me as did his eyes when I turned and met them in a searching glance of mutual curiosity. They held me, but only for a moment, and I never again looked into those dark pits of repellent perversity and evil, although I knew he was often watching me.

After a few more scathing remarks he rose, opened his sack, and produced a large shank of meat and other necessary ingredients for the meal we had despaired of getting despite the efforts of a dozen or more hungry men. Instantly the men sprang to their feet, all eager to help, all happy as children who had never known a deeper desire than to eat.

"We're going to have stew, hurrah!" shouted one of the men.

"Like hell you are," retorted our benefactor.

"Who has the cheek to call what I'm going to cook plain stew? Why, it has a French name so long and fancy that I don't dare to tell for fear it will twist my tongue."

The show was his. And he was making the most of it, enjoying it immensely, never stopping his rhapsodic chatter.

"Sometimes I wonder why people bother about sex when there are so many good things to eat and drink," I heard him say. And he continued in a lower voice: "I've known the time when I drank Pearl de Bourgogne with my meals and took it as a mere matter of fact." Then louder, "Isn't there a drop of hootch in the whole camp?"

Knights of the road were at a king's feast that night. And when it was over we gathered around a little tramp actor who had the oval face of a Caucasian and the almond-shaped eyes of an oriental, a degenerate bum who was dirty, foul-smelling, vulgar, and coarse as the life he represented. But what a host and what a story-teller he was! His was a marvelous accomplishment of simple but artistic elocution. As I listened to him, he became the incarnation of the wisdom and folly of the road I had just begun to travel myself, and he seemed as inexhaustible if not truthful as an encyclopedia on tramping would be. He had been everywhere, or had met someone who had been there. He tried to glorify vice and filth and weakness but never at the expense of narrative interest; this

weaver of vagabond legends was a born artist and actor. Thus he took us wide-eyed, spellbound listeners on a journey to strange lands. And when the last ember of our fire had died and the stillness of an hour long after midnight reigned, we reluctantly left his magic world for our own unromantic reality.

"Suppose, just suppose," Ed chuckled, "that we had taken that pot-bellied tramp as a partner instead of Mac—he was quite insistent you remember."

The idea was incongruous enough to be comical and I joined in the hearty laughter. But I also felt a chill, and with a shudder of disgust I discharged further thoughts of that both fascinating and repulsive human freak.

Maclarens now entered. Forgetful of time's flight, we proceeded on another journey of fancy to Alaska, our land of promise and hope. It was an early hour of morning when our friend left.

And then fell the curtain for the one act of a droll play which found its way into my diary.

10

SEATTLE, our port of departure, is an unusually beautiful city. Its scenic setting is one of splendor and grace, and it seemed to me that the grandeur of land and the softness of sea could not have been blended more ideally than at this picturesque spot. Still I did not like the city. I had lived too long in its slums, I had seen too much from below the dead-line and I knew the chaos that reigned under the surface of apparent order. Seattle became a symbol of the absurd inconsistencies which are incidental to man's social activities and are especially flagrant where he congregates like bees in a hive, but with much less actual order and intelligence.

This time, however, I belonged, with the right of one possessing sufficient money, to that more respectable part of Seattle which lies above the square with the famous Totem Pole. Working clothes were tucked away in a heavy bundle containing my outfit for Alaska. It certainly felt good to be able to stroll around in clean and comfortable clothes. The dollars we individually and col-

lectively possessed were few after all immediate necessities for the trip had been purchased. Trained in the difficult art of making very little money cover our modest needs in a remarkably efficient manner, we succeeded in having a great deal of hilarity even without making these pleasures entirely alcoholic. Only a few days remained before we were to embark as steerage passengers on a steamer sailing for Skagway.

Surprisingly few know how workingmen belonging to that rather nondescript class called the proletariat, seek to satisfy their natural desires and social instincts. I should know, although I am prejudiced; more so, in fact, after having lived as one and after having learned to accept as a mere matter of fact, as normal, what a more casual observer hardly could regard with tolerance. Strong drinks—well, strong stimulants, powerful antidotes, effective anodynes of pain and shame, are needed by those whose minds are starved, dulled, and poisoned, by those who are denied so much. Prostitutes—well, to them come men with their tenderest yearnings, strongest passions, and are granted to live a few precious moments of make-believe love. Indeed a pity, but I cannot condemn; I can feel only compassion. And someday there will be a terrible reckoning.

There is so much in life which we at first instinctively dislike, but upon closer scrutiny, more intimate contact, we acquire a new perspective,

often humoristic, conciliatory, and even touching, depending upon individual tendencies. We never learn to know real life without accepting it as it is. I for one found it hard to believe what I saw under the surface, under removed masques of convention, sham, and hypocrisy.

It rained without any let-up during our brief stay in Seattle; not that rain is quite synonymous with the name of that fair city, but Jupe is very generous along the coast of the Pacific Northwest during this season. March can surely be miserably wet and cold, and next to being penniless and sick, more inducing to melancholy than anything I had yet experienced. As strangers and as seekers of recreations such as provided by theatres, saloons, and poolhalls, a very small section of the city served our needs; in fact, everything could be found within a few blocks of our modest hotel. The contrast with the Seattle I had known before was so pleasing and satisfactory that I never cared to explore other parts. Only Ed treated us to frequent disappearances and for reasons never revealed to us. Maclaren's friend Anton Sinclair now joined us. He had spent the winter working on a copper claim in the Cascade Mountains.

The small square where we had agreed to meet on our last evening before leaving Seattle looked like a glittering oasis in the center of the darker dreariness of surrounding streets. To our little company of would-be Alaskans this place was our

principal outdoor hangout, our favorite meeting place. The restaurant we preferred, the saloons of our choice and their close proximity to our hotel were reasons sufficient to make the Square very attractive to us. With only Ed missing—some fair damsel must have held him captive—Maclarens, Sinclair, and I were planning how to get the most out of this night of all nights. Although tempted, I would not agree to any internal duplication of the external wetness. There remained after a few more eliminations only one source of pleasure, the one I also craved with a longing strong as pain. My voice grew husky and difficult, and something I could not control or subdue hushed me like a hand across my mouth. But I could not go along, even if I felt my blood rush, my head throb, felt as if everything in me begged for release from a long torture of denial.

How strong a dreamer can be, much stronger than himself, his own passionate, demanding ego, and all for the sake of a flimsy ideal of love shyly nursed in his innermost self. No, I would not go. And I wanted to be alone so that I could dream of something still more alluring, even if much the same as what they went out to get. Someday it would be mine, so I told my turbulent heart, but then for only one reason, the one of mutual love. I did not consider myself any better, far from that. I did not even disapprove, because I would seek the

same thing, the very same, only travel another road in search thereof.

Several long hours had passed when my friends returned. Their tale was quite prosaic and entirely void of romance but complete with its termination of stark realism. Two sisters had responded to the courting of my friends—for a monetary consideration, of course—and so, but for a still unwritten ending, this erotic interlude might have soon been forgotten as an occurrence too trivial even to remember. The final and unexpected sequence of drama was soon to be enacted in the wilderness of the North. And then I thought that if it had not been for a slender thread of pride and a frail ideal, perhaps I, instead of our friend, might have been the victim of a common social disease. It broke out with fierce intensity while we were still on the trail. With nothing to relieve the agony and so far from any mining camp that there was no other choice but to continue on, to mush on, our friend certainly paid a terrible price in pain and despondency—all because we wanted to make a night of it and it chanced to happen that way, just that particular way.

IT WAS a day of rain and chill when we left Seattle. As far up forward in the bow of the steamer as I had dared to venture in my search for privacy I stood leaning against a railing. My hands were pressed hard against my side as though they could calm a wildly pounding heart. Fearing that this event might prove too much for my frail equanimity, I had thoughtfully sought out a secluded spot for a scene of rapture . . . a few tears, a few fervid words to relieve a tension which had lasted so long. Not that I was ashamed of my feelings, but I was afraid of the mockery and stinging sarcasm always so liberally given me when I was, in the estimation of my companions, too much my sentimental self. Nordics as a rule resent a free expression of feelings, at least any public display thereof, but I have always been envious of the unconcerned and natural way our Latin brothers, especially, show their marvelous spontaneity, their easily enraptured hearts.

Dim lights burned and flickered among ware-

houses and sheds along the waterfront which was now shrouded in darkness and mist. Even if I could not resist the urge to curse the familiar sight, still the ugly words were spoken ever so gently. I was thankful, oddly so, in a tender, wistful way that night. It was nearly midnight. That late hour seemed to give to the departure something more picturesque and thus enhance the romance I felt so keenly. A sentimental plantation medley sung by some fellow passengers indicated that I was not the only one under the spell. Presently a guitar took up the accompaniment.

Many little voices were speaking within me as I stood watching an event which I expected to be the beginning of a new era. I had never been so sure of success, so self-confident, and so proud. And I pledged myself to fight clean and never to forget what I owed to my future, to those who trusted and loved me, to all, to Mother. . . .

Nature, I reflected, always strives to obtain a normal balance. It demands that all the instincts, desires, and yearnings placed within us shall be expressed and practiced freely, fully, and be governed exclusively by her own laws. Normally nature does not tolerate excesses in either indulgence or in suppression and denial. When something interferes with the naturally arranged scheme of things, then everything is disturbed, upset, in degrees corresponding to the original cause, and remains so until corrected. Only very general ex-

planations can be offered to cover the psychology of the normal and abnormal. And it is claimed that no individual has ever been known and proven to be absolutely normal, only relatively so. In other words, we are even normally a bit abnormal. Contradictions, weird, unexplainable complexes and absurd idiosyncracies are so prevalent with all mental manifestations of man that we must accept them as irrevocably ordained by nature; we are just what we are and not what we should be. All we can hope to attain is to check and to master some of the destructive forces within or without and by their control advance to higher culture, stronger character. Just the very fact that there is within us a burning, passionate desire to discover, to know, to hope, and to struggle for progress, is, I believe, the most absolute, the most convincing proof of a definite and truly divine meaning to our existence, also one that no intelligent and sincere man can deny or disregard. I have more than once, while ravaged by doubt, bowed my head in acceptance of this philosophical axiom—and always felt stronger and happier for it.

Another gong, and the steamer pulled away from the dock. The low lights of deck lanterns enhanced the weird beauty of this busy scene with a soft, lovely blur. Voices floating across the water, then slowly changing until they vanish in the incoherent murmur of the city's own rhapsody of sounds, chains rattling, wet ropes slapping the

decks, hatches closing with heavy thuds, and through it all the smooth, rhythmic strokes of a powerful engine beating time to a symphony of sound and action—what an irresistible, unforgettable appeal to the romantic and adventurous in man. I had taken many a voyage of fancy while watching and dreaming on a busy waterfront, but this time everything was real, strangely, unbelievably real.

In a surprisingly short time there was order in the shadowy chaos of lines, trunks, boxes, and what not. No one seemed to notice me as I stood there alone in the now slowly rising and descending bow. Little waves were lapping the ironclad sides of the ship, and it sounded to me like eager and merry feet dancing a crazy jig. A soft confusion of melody and discord, which was the voice of the sleepy city, grew fainter and then died in the distance. The light, misty rain had stopped, and a quickly clearing sky promised fair weather. Land and sky were a thousand and one lines of sharp and faint silhouettes in nuances of black and white, punctured by glittering lights, electric lamps vying with celestial bodies as if in a contest, and all looking like a mass of glowing, flickering diamonds scattered over a nocturnal painting. The small, playful waves on Puget Sound were growing into long and gently rolling swells from the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The blurred lines and shadowy contours of land were now being obliterated by a

solid color of black. The coast was only faintly distinguishable against the clear but blue-black sky. Hours passed. Sharp strokes of the ship's bell rang out clear and strong: once, twice, several times. . . . Echo answered from the near-by shore.

Tired, but aglow with a strange, languid feeling of contentment, I went below deck, found an unoccupied canvas bunk, and was soon lulled into deep, dreamless sleep.

AFTER having spent a long night in the stuffy air under deck, I was more exhilarated than ever by the cold sea air with its tang of salt. Breakfast had been abominable, to say the least. The recent interlude of comfort and leisure might have caused certain undue pretensions, but I had yet to hear one single voice in defense of the ship's culinary department. Some old-timers even predicted worse to come. The fact that so many were well provided with food purchased ashore seemed to justify a pessimistic outlook. I deferred judgment thinking that most any kind of a meal would surely be an improvement over the first one. Well, it was not. And the fact that it actually was worse slowly pulled me down from the romantic heights I had so laboriously managed to reach. The putrid smoked herring alone, which was everlastingly on the menu, would have made a meek saint bite the hand feeding him, and neither meekness nor saintliness traveled steerage on this trip to Alaska. Our loud complaints proved just that much waste of

effort. On the second day out we were already quite resigned to our culinary fate, but under the leadership of a few impudently bold men, we began to insist on being compensated somehow. And we certainly tried hard to make ourselves obnoxious to officers and crew by disregarding nearly all rules and restrictions pertaining to steerage passengers. We invaded every part of the ship reserved for passengers of first and second class. Only the dining rooms remained closed to all intruders. Even I, with all my timidity and adherence to formality, changed my conduct so much that it caused my friends to notice a transformation which was so acceptable to them.

A permanently more or less empty stomach must have been helpful to mental effort. My diary furnished sufficient proof as to volume if not quality of the planning and plotting I did during this journey to Skagway. Unfortunately we saw of the coast only as much as rain and fog would permit, and that was not a great deal. But what I did see during an entirely too short, though exceptionally clear afternoon was sufficient to make me realize the indescribable grandeur of the frontier empire we were now entering. Word paintings, even at their best, could be only caricatures of the original scenes rolled up before my startled eyes.

There was a large and motley assortment of dogs aboard. A sudden demand for these animals had already caused a flurry in prices asked at every port

of call. What I saw on the boat of these faithful companions of man made me question the good judgment of some owners, because many dogs appeared to be the very contrast to all I had ever heard or seen of Alaskan huskies and malamutes. A few of them were as nearly in the class of lap dogs as could be determined by casual observance.

Late one evening, the second or third out from Seattle, I left the sleep-inducing atmosphere of steerage for a stroll in fresh air and for the equally invigorating pleasure to mingle among men and women of means rather than of culture. The first class smoking room was empty. The usual noise had ceased a few minutes ago when the last members of a hilariously intoxicated crowd had retired. Something prompted me to linger there after the gay show was over. Perhaps it was just the desire to be alone in a place where it was so difficult to escape others. The smoke from my cigarette rose slowly, lazily upward in the thick air.

The door opened, and two men I had never noticed before entered. One was quite young, almost a boy; the other man I took to be his father. Both would command attention any place. The older man had all the earmarks of gentility and distinction, such as one likes to attribute to one to the manor born, and yet this was blended with the typical appearance of a hardy miner, or sourdough, as the veterans of the North are called. Without the slightest indication of having noticed

my presence, they seated themselves so near that I could have overheard even a whispered conversation. The younger man carried a large steel guitar, a rather bulky object to take along on a stampede, I thought, not realizing that theirs might not be my mode of traveling. This beloved instrument made my heart beat a bit faster in anticipation of a musical treat. The younger man showed in his very attitude a deep, yet delicately reserved reverence for his companion, and he looked every inch a thoroughbred, a scion of culture if not of wealth. The fact that they were quite intoxicated did not matter in my estimation; it rather deepened the interest with a subtle element of complication. Besides, such trivial things are seldom held against men in the North. Conceptions of conduct are often a matter of geography.

The vibrant beauty of tones so clear and clean as only those from strings of steel can be, would have hushed a crowd, hushed any listener. The player began to sing. First humming softly, as if feeling his way and only slowly, almost cautiously, reaching the height and fullness of the melodious song "Who Is Sylvia," by Schubert. Somehow it seemed to be the very song for the occasion and the setting. His voice impressed me as well trained, though quite mediocre, except for that rare gift of being able to convey an unusual glow and zest of genuine and strong emotions.

The older man had the aloof appearance of a

stoic philosopher, and I thought that once upon a time men like him must have frequented the painted porch in the Agora at Athens. His face remained set, in fact almost vacant, but there was a sharp, fixed something in his eyes, which showed how intently he was listening. Only a faint, and I thought, whimsical smile played at times around the deep lines of his hard mouth. It seemed so queer that they had not spoken for such a long time, yet there appeared to be some sort of communication between them through the medium of music. Their eyes held each other constantly, and occasionally a new song would come as if in response to a silent request. Strange, I thought at first, but after a truly remarkable concert had ended, the two companions took up a most matter-of-fact conversation about the stampede. Not even the slightest attention was paid to me at any time, which disregard was accepted in the proper spirit of abjection by a man who realized that he was intruding upon the premises of first class.

Stops were made at several ports. A few hours at Ketchikan gave us our first impressions of Alaska. These did not at all conform with my preconceived ideas. The famous fishing town looked both uninterestingly tame and squalid—perhaps too much so because of the rain and darkness. The weather was not favorable to shore excursions during the entire journey. Wrangell had a somewhat stronger appeal. There begins Telegraph Creek Trail,

famous since the first stampedes to the North. The town is also the center of a promising mining district. Several passengers embarked here, some of them bound for Silver Creek over the inland route. Then Juneau, the modest little capital of Alaska, for another brief stop. Brief, to be true, but still sufficiently long for many—too many—drinks in a saloon owned and operated by two brothers who a year ago had employed both Sinclair and Maclaren in Atlin where they owned a mine. Thus the money spent for booze had a somewhat tenable value as an investment in good will. Our funds were now so nearly exhausted that we needed good reasons or strong excuses for every expenditure. After this last and entirely unexpected financial drain, I experienced an uncomfortable, empty feeling near the pit of my stomach whenever I thought of the now so unproportional but related subjects: distance to destination and available funds. But God is kind to children and drunkards, and I told my wayward friends that we should be eligible to special consideration for we certainly could qualify under both categories. My inability to understand the new money values encountered in Alaska had already caused considerable apprehension, and I was quite disturbed over the sudden shrinkage of the dollar I had learned to regard as an emblem of stability. I hoped that it would prove to be just as easy and simple to make money in Alaska as it was to spend it.

During our last night on the boat it turned very cold. We were now in a long, narrow and winding channel. The mountains impressed me more, perhaps because of the better visibility rather than any marked scenic improvement. They were cold, hard and forbidding in their dignified whiteness, and I felt as though they greeted us with a chilling frown. Another turn, and Skagway came into view with a bunch of grey and black spots and lines across the mouth of a narrow valley.

We did not tarry long after the steamer had landed at a dock extending far out into the bay. It had not occurred to me that the rather long hike to the hotel might require warmer footwear, so I started out innocently and stylishly outfitted in a pair of light oxfords. The cold was painful from the very start; my shoes seemed frozen to the feet by the time shore was reached; total numbness frightened me before we had passed the shanties and log cabins of the lower end of town, and when at last in the little hotel, I must have acted as a lunatic the way I rushed up to the stove and frantically removed my shoes and socks. It took considerable rubbing with snow to bring my dormant organs of locomotion back to normalcy. Pain and fright were my only penalties, however, for not knowing how to dress where King Frost reigns so autocratically.

13

WE'VE got to hike more than forty miles today, boys, and it's a steady climb too, so do your darndest," announced Maclaren, our self-appointed leader, when we started out. "No place to camp until we've crossed the divide and get down to Lake Bennett."

Fourteen long and full hours were required for that supreme effort, and I don't believe I have ever been so tired, so hungry or felt better in all my life as when we at last found a sheltered woodland grove near that longed-for lake.

Spruce and pine grew with parklike dignity on a small level field and there was so much snow on every branch that it made one wonder how it could all stay on. We made camp, ate our pork and beans with uncounted cups of strong tea, and while we sat around the fire, smoking and chatting, Maclaren built an ingenious lean-to of spruce boughs. Lazy thoughts retraced their steps to linger on the spell and glamour of the conquered trail. It was bitter cold, and the soft snow

crunched underfoot. Some of the stars seemed so near that one should have been able to reach them from atop the mountains in the south, and all of them flickered and shone as brightly as they can only through Nature's own telescope of crystal-clear mountain air. Now and then a flame licked a pitchy limb, sending rockets and sprays of brilliant sparks high into the air. Only our voices and the soft roar and crackle of the fire shattered a stillness and silence I had never known to be so perfect.

It seemed strange that so much could have been crowded into one day—into the first few miles of a long trail. We discussed it with the serenity of something more eventful and adventurous than merely that of the new and unexpected.

We had started out right. It would have been unforgivable not to try to steal a ride on that marvelous engineering feat, the Skagway-White-horse Railroad; we owed it to ourselves, to our reputation. Access to a freight car was easily accomplished—too easily in fact. Anxious moments —then the door was pushed open, and an extremely affable train dignitary greeted us with a smile—I was willing to swear that he even bowed, although my companions claimed he never did.

"I happen to observe you taking the wrong car," he said with inimitable irony. "May I suggest that you move over to one of our warm and comfortable coaches, yours for a very small consideration."

We left the car after this gentle persuasion, feel-

ing both crestfallen and foolish. My own appearance must have been something similar to that of a dog slinking away with his tail between his legs.

"Well, I'll be damned," was Ed's ambiguous remark, and he voiced what we all must have felt.

My bundle was heavy from the very start; too heavy when the miles were but few; unbearably so while Skagway was still in view. Desperate, I staggered on, but after my companions had refused to accept even as gifts any of my belongings, I had no other choice but to dispose of nearly all my clothing, several books, and many other items I had considered indispensable. A heavier heart was only partly compensated by the lighter load and I never ceased to question myself why I had not kept some of the things I afterward needed so badly.

Maclarens was always in the lead. I don't believe I have ever seen his long legs take longer steps. No matter how much I liked him, that part of him which could take such unnaturally long strides now inspired something akin to hatred.

It seemed almost incongruous that a railroad track should continue to be our trail in Alaska. As we approached White Pass we could see the track like a gently curved line along the steep mountain side and around the scraggy bends far ahead, rising higher and higher toward the peaks and so far above the narrow valley below that it seemed to dare the feat of crossing with utter dis-

dain of danger. Once we saw a snowslide and Maclaren told us of an avalanche in 1898 which struck and killed many stampeders like an angry God smiting invaders of a forbidden realm. Later he pointed out where it had happened. It was fortunate that our leader was so well versed in the lore of this country. In this magnificent setting even the commonplace could not be anything but interesting. The infinitely grand scenery invoked something equally infinite in one's mind—extremes always meet; they are akin.

"What will happen if we meet a train?" was a standing question every time we passed over a narrow trestle or at those breath-taking and heart-racing stretches with a high snow wall on one side and a perpendicular mountain side on the other. There was no answer, of course. At a higher altitude it became worse, which, of course, was to be expected, because vision on a road where every foot was part of a curve could at best be only poor.

Despite weariness, despite everything, every step was another thrill, another adventure in emotional reactions to the hugeness, to the crazy, amazing weirdness of ice and snow and rocks. Words could never portray Glacier Loop when sunrays play there with shadows and colors—neither the gentle lines and dignity of Dome Mountain—nor the desolation of the ragged and torn Sawtooth Mountains—no tale would ring quite true to one who has seen these things. Then gorges, glaciers, everything

in alpine scenery that can be grand and impressive, and above it a blue, a lovely azure-blue sky. Who could ever forget it?

Near the summit we crossed the short span of an unbelievably high bridge. Height seldom affects me, but this time I felt dizzy and scared when I looked down. There was no railing on either side, and even the ties seemed to be shorter. Another deep cut through snow and rock, another sharp bend, and I heard the long, faint whistle of an approaching train. It froze me, it stifled every muscle for a moment of terror. One of us—we never learned to know who it was—gave a piercing scream that rent the air. There was something of both horror and warning in this primitive call of danger, and four fear-crazed men tore, dug, and kicked as they climbed to safety over the lowest point of the high snowbank. Another moment and a big rotary plow rounded the curve a few yards ahead, throwing before itself an impenetrable cloud of snow. We were frightened out of our senses, and I for one was from that moment cursed with a similar form of nightmare which haunted me for years. Suppose we had been caught on the bridge! What a horrible meeting with death it would have been! Death below, death on both sides and a cutting, crushing, mangling death rushing toward us. The only bit of mercy would have been that there could not have been time even for the thought of a prayer. Cold perspiration trickled

off my forehead, and the clothing stuck to my clammy skin for hours.

"Did any of you boys return the engineer's greeting? He waved at us, you know," I asked to break the tense silence.

Nobody answered, but when they stared at me I thought that my own eyes must have looked like theirs.

Two days later we arrived in Atlin.

14

THERE are less miles to the coast over the mountains than we can hike in a day over a good trail," Maclaren told us one day when we were looking at the terrible beauty of the Coast Range. "And it's said that the Indians know of a glacier pass where they can cross in wintertime. Guess they do it for better reasons than the mere fun of it, though. Besides attracting tourists, the mountains also serve to protect the merchants in Atlin."

"How?" we asked in unison.

"Makes it almost impossible to run away without paying one's bills. There is only one trail out and in, and the Mounted Police keep a close watch. Last summer, though, a young fellow they were after for stealing tried his getaway over the mountains. It was claimed that the Police did not even bother to look for him after they found out that he had taken the old Indian trail. I suppose they figured that was the end of him."

First I wished that Maclaren had never told us about this because I could never look at the gran-

deur along the southern horizon without again thinking of store bills and of a refugee of justice who was not even entitled to sympathy. The irrelevant association was something like sacrilege. But there were times when I felt that a red color of drama along that trail had lent a bit of human warmth to a cold and stern picture.

We did not stay long in Atlin, the picturesque center of a vast mining district of British Columbia. More sober consideration of circumstances prompted us to give up thoughts of going much farther. We were broke and had to find work, cold facts which we had learned no dreams and no philosophy could materially change for better.

Stately forests of spruce and scattered patches of tamarack and birch now formed a more idyllic scenery. The trees were mostly of medium height—nothing like those on the coast—but they were unusually well proportioned with long and even branches. It had snowed several days, and now they looked like Christmas trees covered with cotton and mica. This was the first clear, though still bitter cold day since leaving Lake Bennett. The sun glittered and sparkled in the snow with millions of little lights, often so strong that it hurt our eyes. A flock of ptarmigan watched us from a clump of alders; a quaint whistle of warning was repeated, each time a little stronger, and as we came up a rabbit turned, ran for cover, and then the white birds rose slowly in a circling flight. Little bird

trails looked like finger drawings in the snow; deeper tracks of rabbits had made miniature highways and here and there we noticed where larger animals had registered their presence since the last fall of snow. Everything held me in a never released grip of enchantment, and I thought that this surely must be a good land to live in.

Above a plateau, green and brown with trees and white with snow, rose gently rounded hills backed in the far distance by glistening mountain peaks. Maclarens could soon point out a canyonlike opening where ends a little valley known as Birch Creek, the place where we hoped to establish our temporary home. It was evening when we reached the crest of the first hill. We were hushed in amazement as we stopped and stared at the majestic beauty spread before us. This was a place which could not have failed to impress the most indifferent mind. The road-builders must have deliberately made a long and impractical curve just to reach this crest with its glorious vista of scenic beauty. Then a dreamer and builder must have happened along, because against the sky and the mountains now blurred in mist and evening dusk was the sharp silhouette of a stately log mansion.

The roughly hewn logs were larger than any I had yet seen since leaving the coast. A quaint thatched roof, large casement windows with shutters, and a spacious front porch with large pillars and hand-carved railings gave the house a genuine

Old World appearance. Before we were ready to ask Maclaren he began to tell us about the place.

"That house—they call it the Vista House—was built by one of the first miners in these parts," he said. "He struck it rich on Birch Creek and liked it so well here that he never left. It took a lot of money to build it—and look at the fancy landscaping. Years ago he lost his mine and money—booze, women and old age, they say. One of the traders in Atlin bought or stole the house, but he let the old miner live in it until he died. Lots of tourists come here because there is no place around here that can beat it for scenery. Last year it was a roadhouse."

Maclaren talked on, but I was too occupied with my own thoughts to hear what he said. This lovely spot seemed to be something infinitely high above any prosaic associations, like a natural sanctuary where the likes of me would want to worship, dream, and feel. I thought that during the mystery and fullness of an evening like this, a man on his knees right where I stood, would have looked as natural as though he were praying in a temple.

By this time I was so rapt in awe that I did not notice my friends had left until one of them called from a side trail below the hill. When we were about to pass the house two women appeared in a partly opened window. One of them leaned out and her large, eager eyes, glistening in the soft half-light, met and held mine in an almost instantly

averted glance. And when I was only a few feet away, they both burst into a fit of laughter which had such an unmistakable ring of mockery that I felt myself jeered at, scoffed at. What on earth could be the reason, I asked myself, feeling extremely uncomfortable. Considering the distance I could not possibly have been overheard talking to myself out on the knoll. My appearance, dress, or something, must have been the principal cause of mirth. In any event I certainly did not help matters by suddenly starting on a run as fast as my weary legs would permit. . . .

"From the sublime to the ridiculous there is only one step."—I learned the truth of that long before I knew who had expressed it so well. And I wondered what particular evil spirit had now come into my heart and spoiled and stolen so many beautiful impressions and caused me to act and feel the way I did. Futile to reason with myself—that I knew only too well—and so the blues settled in my mind very much like undigested food lingers in the sensitive pit of one's stomach.

IT WAS too late the first night to negotiate for the cabin we wanted. The owner lived only a short distance from there, but neither trail nor darkness would permit seeing him until in the morning. Even if disappointed that the door and windows were boarded up, we were glad to find our intended abode unoccupied. We managed to break in by forcing one of the small windows, but the task took considerable time and effort. We did not intend to inform anybody how we had spent the first night, although a little thing like housebreaking did not disturb our sleep. Early in the morning we removed all evidences of occupation, placed our bundles outside, and walked over to see the owner. He let us have the cabin for a moderate rental, and thus Birch Creek had more formally accepted four new arrivals.

The first week was spent quite leisurely, although we were busy learning about this fascinating country. It took several days to settle down to regular housekeeping and to put the new home into shape.

Sinclair and Maclaren brought a large supply of food from the trading post on Gold Creek. The storekeeper had promised to extend credit not to exceed fifty dollars. This amount would not permit any extravagance in cooking, although it should be sufficient for a month or so if supplemented with meat. Maclaren was "the mighty Nimrod," and many a rabbit and ptarmigan suffered a premature death through his snares and an ancient, discarded gun we had found and repaired.

Sinclair and Maclaren spent a great deal of time visiting with friends and getting better acquainted both on Birch Creek and some of the surrounding mining districts. This was done with the view of finding work in case the job promised them in Juneau failed to materialize. The mine belonging to the saloonkeepers, who had caused such a severe drain on our resources, was not yet operating, and much depended upon the outcome of some development work now carried on. The extent of pay dirt was being determined, and rumors had it that some very rich gravel had been found. Hence a feeling of optimism in our cabin, and even Ed and I entertained hopes of sharing in the expected abundance of work. As a matter of course Mac-laren and Sinclair were exempted from household duties, and it never occurred to Ed and me to question this privilege. We were subject to much and well-deserved criticism, and the otherwise pleasant calm of everyday life was disturbed by many and

often violent quarrels. Sinclair participated at times, although usually functioning only as an umpire when a friendly fray was on.

I did not tell anyone about the incident in which I had figured as an unwilling object of comedy to the strange girls in the Vista House. Past experiences had taught me to avoid furnishing my associates with material for teasing. They had enough of that as it was. However, it was impossible for me to forget the cause of a mental depression which had lasted so long, and I had made up my mind to investigate at the first opportunity. Like children of fancy born in its wedlock with idle hours, certain quite definite ideas or rather dreams had been conceived by me to conform with what I had felt after gazing for a few fleeting moments into those gleeful and curious eyes. For the sake of what happened to these dreams I would have given a lot to be able to draw a line, a thick, obliterating one, through them, and forget out of kindness to him who just could not help being sentimental and foolish. Late one night Maclaren brought home a tale which proved a fatal blow to the gossamer, flimsy structure of a romance I had wished into existence. He had been to the Vista House, and had spent a good portion of the night there with a party from up the creek. His hilarity indicated a liberal indulgence in alcoholic refreshments. Mac-laren had a truly marvelous faculty of describing happenings and weaving tales in an interesting and

distinctly individual manner. He displayed real ingenuity in using striking similitudes and had a fine sense of humor and of drama. This time he wanted to impress us, and his description of the affair was unusually good. The older one of the two women —so he told us—had been the life of the party, in spite of the fact that she was comparatively old and had none of the physical charms which graced the younger companion. They were related, he said, but he did not know exactly how closely. The apparent age difference would have been enough to take them as mother and daughter, but he was sure that was not the case. He dwelt so often and with such endearing words on the unusual beauty of the young girl that less sophisticated listeners would have thought that he had actually fallen in love. "What a peach!" and "Oh, boy, how she could love!" were often repeated expressions and they rang with vexing discord in my ears long after Maclaren had snored off into sleep. Wide awake until morning, I tossed uneasily in my bed, a prey to clashing emotions. The fact that one detail in the vivid reality conveyed by my friend had conformed with the beauty I had endowed my creation of fancy, made it all the worse for me now. I was sick at heart—disgusted! An exquisitely pretty dream, woven with the frailness of a cob-web, had been cruelly torn, and even if I could laugh I would do it just to hide and to mock this new folly of that foolish heart of mine.

"Sporting girls—so that's what they are!" I thought, feeling something hard well up in my breast. "Heartless, cold, and money-thirsty leeches preying on love-hungry fools whom Nature has rendered blind in the relentless grip of her demanding desire!"

My fists had involuntarily tightened during his story, and I hated even the youth and the beauty of the one whose body my pal had bought for but a few dollars. Forgetting, however, is a prerogative of youth, and regardless of the emotional pitch characteristic of all my day dreaming, this little affair of fancy with the girl faded for a time into only a neutral memory.

Quite frequently miners dropped in, and I do not think it was always just coincidence that the calls usually occurred around mealtime. Ed and I were not able to devote much time to visiting, but we managed to get well acquainted in the immediate neighborhood. Everything was so different here and this difference was in itself a matter of paramount interest. Many of the miners, and especially those with a historical background from days of the great stampede, appealed strongly to my imagination. And I shall never be ashamed to admit that I was taken advantage of because there is always a compensation for a good listener even if he is imposed upon. What mattered occasionally acting the part of a credulous fool when my credulity was of the kind which accepted the im-

possible just because it often was better and much more interesting than reality! Willing ears get many a tale never told to others. Even commonplace things were talked about in a different manner of speech which radiated a subtle fascination of its own. Most men were very energetic and gifted with a rather childish but undoubtedly helpful belief in themselves and their country. Even their uncouth manners and loud bragging seemed to fit into the general picture. What a philosopher might call a "cosmic sense" was very much in evidence among the miners whom I learned to know more intimately. Probably they were better attuned to the all-pervading, overwhelming nearness of such a sublimely primitive nature, and there was often a most profound and straightforward clearness in their observations. They indicated a surprising absence of idiosyncracies incidental to modern living and culture. In spite of much to make life sordid and men hard and coarse, I nevertheless saw more of guileless and unspoiled souls in the eyes of sourdoughs than I had ever observed among men of my own class. In their informal company I felt at ease and soon learned to trust and respect most of them.

The past lingers on as if reluctant to leave the Atlin Mining District. The geographical seclusion and its comparative inaccessibility have, perhaps, assisted in making modern mining methods slow to enter this field, but the principal reason individual

mining on a small scale has been carried on so long is undoubtedly due to the mining laws of British Columbia, which limit the placer claims to such a small size that as a rule only the cheapest methods can be used and employment of extra labor is seldom profitable. This has saved many individual miners from being quickly eliminated by large corporations, although they are gradually being bought up. Atlin now had one of the largest hydraulic mines in British Columbia, and several others were expected to be operating soon. Rockers, china-wheels, ground-sluicing and slow, laborious drifting into the hillsides to prospect for and to tap pay-streaks were some of the means and ways of mining I observed. The patience and confidence displayed by many miners were amazing. Very few, if any, seemed to question the existence of rich treasures everywhere within the confines of the gold-bearing areas; the only and the all-pervading problem was how to get it. To me it appeared as if only supreme faith, so difficult to associate with practical mining, could have prompted one mine owner I met to engage in digging a ditch single-handed, although it would require at least three years of constant labor to complete. This accomplished, he would be in a position to prospect a portion of his mine which he believed, yes, only believed, contained "pay dirt." I hope that a kind fate granted him success or gave him another strong

illusion to enable him to carry on regardless of failure.

Our money was soon gone; in fact it lasted only a few days. Cost of food was high, and I certainly found it hard to accept the new values. They were not in a just proportion to wages. Nothing less than twenty-five cents was accepted in circulation, being the smallest unit, and I believe this fact conveys better than a long discourse how the cost of everything had been moved upward in Alaska. A maximum wage of five dollars per diem including board and lodging was comparatively low, especially when considering the shortness of the mining season. Our debt to the store was seldom discussed, but we were quite aware that it caused much gloom and often made us irritable. Rabbit meat helped to keep down the cost of living, but even with the most rigid economy we knew that our credit at the store would take care of only another week or two. Then it would be all meat on the menu until we could find a buyer for our labor—our own article of commerce!

16

THE short cut we called The Dead Man's Trail led from the highway by the Vista House to the trading post and reduced the distance several miles. Except for freighting of heavier supplies this trail was always used by the miners in our district. What little buying we did was, as a matter of necessity rather than convenience, done at this trading post instead of in Atlin. It was a small but active place, consisting of a large store, a couple of saloons, and several log cabins. One or two of the latter were brothels, I had been told.

When my turn came for performing the rather unwelcomed duty of further increasing our charge account with the store and the little appreciated job of acting as a packhorse, I made up my mind that if at all possible without a personal call I was going to try to find out something about the two girls in the Vista House. After losing a heated argument trying to have my partners reduce the unreasonably heavy load they expected me to carry, I started out early one cold morning. The

trail wound its crooked course between rocks and boulders down to the canyon. There it turned sharply uphill directly below the Vista House. After making the steep ascent I reached the rim just as the sun was beginning to lower its lazy rays into the wintry abysm below me. Finding a sheltered spot which gave me a clear view of the proud building, I threw myself down in the soft snow to rest, smoke and wonder.

The house itself looked as if asleep. The window shutters were closed and no smoke rose upward in the calm of early morning. A flock of sparrows were playing and chattering by the side facing east and which was now basking its round logs and the gently sloping thatched roof in sunshine filtered through clear mountain air into dazzling brightness.

A place like that house, I mused in idle thoughts, should be a shrine to beauty and happiness, should shelter nothing else. One of the occupants, so my friend had told me, was a girl still in her teens and very, very pretty. Could it be that she was not really bad but only an unfortunate victim of circumstances, and still worth knowing, worth helping? Or was she just another empty, insipid "inconsequential" who had drifted into a bypath of vice as if born to that fate?

The sluggish smoke from a fire which must have been hard to kindle was now rising slowly from the huge chimney and for a while it hovered like

a little cloud over the house. Then a bare arm extending from the wide sleeve of a kimono pushed open a window and while trying to fasten the shutters the late riser leaned over so far that it looked for a moment as though she might lose her balance. Carefully trying not to expose myself I rose and hurried down the trail, hoping to get a better view of the girl. She lingered in the window same as anyone naturally would have done seeing so much loveliness heralding spring—the morning was indeed perfect. The trail would take me within only a few feet from her and I felt sure that I would now have the longed-for opportunity to verify Maclarens opinion. But before then I noticed that she had already seen me and I was made the object of some very open scrutiny which the rough trail prevented me from returning. When I finally passed she hurriedly left the window. I had seen enough, however, to realize with a flutter of my heart that she was indeed very beautiful. Relevant, perhaps, yet I hated to feel so hard and bitter when I touched some small coins in my pocket and instantly tumbled down from my world of dreams into the chill of such a hateful realization that any man, the basest as well as the best, could buy her for less than the price of a bottle of whiskey. There was no competition here, not even the one on the auction block of slave days where the highest bidder could claim human bodies with some degree of right—less than none

in her case. I also thought of some physically and morally repulsive miners I knew up the creek.

Shrugging my shoulders, I managed to proceed with another train of thoughts. I was still in the cold shadow of the house when I turned to my right from the highway to take the short cut over Dead Man's Gulch. Then a door opened noisily and I heard quickly approaching steps and the rustle of a silk skirt close behind—still I did not look back until a voice called out:

"Please wait a moment." And then when closer: "Say, Kid, will you do something for me at the post?"

Removing my cap I stopped and watched the girl I had seen in the window run up to me. Startled, I found that the object of my vagaries was fairer than anything I had ever dared to imagine. Somehow I was not even able to respond to a friendly smile spread as a greeting over a pale face with heavily rouged cheeks and lips painted crimson-red. First it hushed me and then I felt like exclaiming loudly my astonishment as I stared wide-eyed at the sensuous grace of her body, at the proud carriage and the delicate but finely chiseled features.

"Good morning, Madam," I finally managed to say. She also looked surprised, and there crept into her expressive eyes something of a faltering question. Another awkward pause followed, although only for a moment and then she asked:

"I've seen you before, haven't I?"

"Yes, Ma'am," I replied, "and maybe you also remember having the doubtful pleasure of poking fun at me when we met a few weeks ago. By the way, we weren't introduced, though. . . ."

"Of course, I remember—ha, ha," she laughed. "So you were the kid with the big bundle who acted so queerly and then ran away like we had scared you."

Noticing that I felt hurt, she continued with a disarming appeal in her voice:

"Oh, please do forgive me. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings that time though you sure looked a scream, especially while talking to yourself out on the knoll."

Restraining a strong temptation to parry with some ironic remark, I said:

"Well, I never enjoyed having strangers laugh at me, but that's all right—let's forget it. What did you want me to do for you at the post? Sorry, but I'm in a hurry."

"That's right—there was something I wanted. Let me see." She hesitated as though she had completely forgotten her request. "Oh, yes, get me a bottle of port wine. Here's the money, and don't forget. I'll be waiting for you. Goodbye, Kid."

The narrow trail sloped gently for a few hundred feet from the Vista House toward the gulch, but there it dipped abruptly down into a spruce-clad bottom where winter-cold dwelt among deep

shadows. An owl hooted far down in the mournful calm. A curious little rabbit stole cautiously up to the trail when it heard my footsteps shatter the silence. A cloud above me was loitering northward, and despite the chill, I felt a hint of spring in the cool caress of the south wind. Pine had lent fragrance to the air, and when a swift bird crossed the gulch so near that I could hear the swish of its wings and see its white feathers gleam, then I felt how near of kin such things are to me.

Many confusing thoughts followed me to the trading post that morning. The beauty of clean, distinct, and intelligent features, the graceful lines of a young and lithe body were as if engraved on my mind, there to remain forever. I was surprised not to experience an expected turmoil within me, especially after being so deeply impressed by her close resemblance to the girl I had met in Winnipeg. Her expressive, rather wistful but tired eyes were artificially enhanced by the thin, blackened eyebrows and the sharp contrast against rouge and powder. The deep, glistening blue in them made me think of lapis lazuli. They had a strong sensual appeal and were large, intelligent, and oddly moist as those of a high-strung dreamer. Marks of dissipation were evident, but the usual telltale stigmas of her life were still hidden; passion flowers wilt early after they are picked! She seemed tired and bored, and her speech and manners were quite professional. Alas, already, for many of my resolu-

tions. They were crowded back by new and unexpected desires pressing my heart like gentle but firm hands.

The solemn silence of the short gulch was both depressing and inspiring. Somehow it reminded me of a cathedral I had once seen in northern Italy, though only the steep hillsides, the subdued light, the shadows and the silence were suggestive of any likeness. Dead Man's Gulch was named after a tragedy once enacted in its dark stillness. One could still see a prospect hole a few feet from the trail where many years ago a cave-in had killed a prospector. His name was forgotten—names seldom last long in the North—but the mere fact that he had existed was at least distinguished by having had his tragic death commemorated and by prompting some wanderer to linger a few moments in his rush to contemplate by a nameless grave on the uncertainty of life—I always did! Most of us never leave any lasting monuments, neither on the surface above our final resting places, nor in any hearts. Not that it may matter so much in the Great Scheme of Things, although the desire to be remembered after death must have been placed within us for a purpose. The heart often has reasons which the mind does not understand—“*logique du coeur*,” to quote Pascal.

It was late when I arrived at the trading post. My least considerate partner had said as a parting remark:

"Remember that the devil will surely take you if you don't come back in time for supper."

The warning had an irritating quality of ringing in my ears now when I was already late. The pantry at home was empty, and I knew there would be hell to pay if I played truant without having some excuses like getting drunk or breaking a leg—both acceptable to my roughneck friends.

The only store at the trading post enjoyed its freedom from competition with well-deserved pride. In fact, the only thing subject to criticism might have been the outrageous prices charged on a stock which really was very complete. Almost every imaginable requisite for mining and prospecting was in evidence. After waiting a long time in the busy place, I finally had our credit verified by the storekeeper. I do not believe that my unminerlike appearance improved our standing, but I might have read his appraising and cold stare wrongly. In any event, I soon had an assortment of supplies weighing in excess of the estimated sixty pounds ready for my protesting back and shoulders. Even if it did no good I cursed and continued to do so the many protruding corners of cans and packages which made my load exceedingly uncomfortable. And the addition of just one lone bottle of wine could have been likened to the proverbial straw breaking the camel's back. My hands were both needed to relieve the pressure of the tight shoulderstraps so after trying more than

one place I left the bottle in a pocket of my pants where it made its obnoxious presence felt at every step.

It was a trudging, obstinate beast of burden and not a lofty dreamer returning to his home late that afternoon. With frequent rests and as nearly exhausted as I have ever been on the trail, I finally saw the Vista House come into view. The last and worst hill, the one out of Dead Man's Gulch, had been made by crawling and climbing, and then I stopped for another well-deserved rest. Fatigue of the kind I experienced was not conducive to dreaming, but with the end of the trail almost in sight, my rebellious thoughts subsided.

Only a few minutes ago I had left a man lying helpless, in fact almost unconscious, by the trail through the gulch. Yet I had not tried to help, and I had never even questioned my obviously un-Samaritan act while gazing at the repulsive features of a half-breed of whom I had heard so much lately. He was drunk, dead drunk, but in Alaska one soon learns to think twice before interfering with the normal course of such trivial things. With the suddenness of a shock the thought now came that he might have been on his way to the Vista House, and gone was the tired, pleasant calm of my mind. Was she really so low that she could sell herself to a beast like him, I wondered, and again I rebelled with unreasonable anger against the monstrous association of so much of the love-

liest and fairest in womanhood with such a degrading vice. It was Half-breed Jim whom I had left on his cold but soft bed of snow. The sight of him, drunk or sober, would inspire no pleasant thoughts. His regular breathing was evidence enough, I figured, that he was very much alive and undoubtedly recovering as normally as could be expected. He was too well dressed to suffer much from the cold—the Indian in him would stand a great deal more. Liquor, however, would be the sure agent of destruction in his case. It was sickening to see the sodden, filthy wreck of a man who embodied so many of the worst characteristics of the white and Indian races—they never mix any too well.

While resting I turned over in my mind a story I had recently heard about this half-breed. He and a miner had left last fall on a stampede to the Cassiar Country, just as the rigid winter had begun its despotic rule. That they left as partners is about all officially and undisputedly known. Jim returned alone several months later. He then proceeded to get on a perpetual drunk and he had very little to tell except that his partner had committed suicide—details were meager, however. Somewhere in the upper reaches of Lake Teslin they got lost during a snowstorm. Hunting was poor, then worse, and soon their grub ran out. Next thing to do on a winter trail in Alaska is to kill the weakest dogs and keep on until they are all consumed on the altar of demon hunger. Jim claimed they did. Then

came the night of tragedy. As I heard this story told I remember wondering if the air could have been calm, crisp, and crystal-clear with its arctic chill, wondering if the stars were as close as I have known them to be when sixty below and when snow and moon have given the mountains a ghastly bluish pallor, suggestive of death, sublime but still gruesome. Jim, no doubt, never even thought of telling about such things. He said that they were sitting by a campfire after a day of many fruitless miles. As wood is plentiful below the permanent snow line it must have been one of might and warmth, probably a real sourdough fire. Then his partner rose with a snarl, swayed a bit, and then rushed with a death scream into the roaring fire. Crackling sparks must have danced madly as the flames flared up and became a pyre . . . then strange, hideous sounds of burning flesh in a setting where death is omnipresent in everything perceptible. All these things, had they really happened, could have made a stronger, better man than the half-breed stay drunk for the rest of his life—well, it was not for me to judge.

A pair of ptarmigans, snow-white, alert, and graceful, were now beginning to stage something like a play of hide-and-seek, and I watched them grow bolder and friendlier until at last one came so close that I could have reached out and caught it. A large bird with feathers gleaming in blue and gold sat on a snow-heavy branch of a spruce tree

and seemed to wonder if there were going to be any crumbs left over from the sandwich it had watched me eat. And I was sure that his eyes glowed a bit more kindly after I had scattered a generous meal on the snow for him and my other feathered friends. It was getting late but I was loath to leave. The sun had sunk below the mountain wall of the Coast Range although it was still shining on several near-by hilltops and on a few clouds slowly moving eastward across the blue ceiling above me. Occasionally the wind dipped down to my retreat, and it felt like cool fingers lightly touching my cheeks, gently running through my hair. From the darkening depth of the forest came many little voices, and there was a constant rustle and murmur that, for all the world, could have been soft strains in a symphony. It was easy and sweet to linger on, watching, listening.

After another glance at my watch I scrambled to my feet. I was hours overdue and I realized only too well what my friends would say. There was no time to spare for any "rendezvous" with the girl in the Vista House, but I was determined to see her regardless of what might happen at home. By running nearly all the way I arrived at the big log mansion in only a few minutes. For a moment I stopped, suddenly in the grip of conflicting thoughts. Despite the poignant fact that the fair mistress of this place was a woman of "easy virtue"—and even that was putting it rather mildly—and

despite another fact that I could not find one single extenuating reason for my agitation, I now felt as self-conscious and nervous as if this informal call was going to be an affair of momentous importance.

Circumstances, to be sure, can alter cases.

THE DISTANT mountains were now losing their clear, cold perspective in the shimmering haze of the dying twilight and they loomed as an immense, unscalable wall of snow and rock, reaching high up on the horizon with a sharp, jagged line here and there forming peaks and domes. Above were broad belts of sunset colors ranging from lustrous white to soft tints of yellow, red, and finally blue, growing deeper and darker toward the western hemisphere. A star or a planet, large as a tiny disc and brilliant with a peculiar sheen, seemed to hang just a few feet above the steep roof of the Vista House; others flickered and flashed as they pierced the darkening canopy of heaven. In many low places transparent vapor clouds floated around, and a high fog bank was creeping up Birch Creek from the plateau below the canyon. One could easily fancy that fairies were dancing on a night like this—the stage was set for a play of dreams.

Still a bit hesitant, I walked up on the front porch, and while stamping the snow off my boots

another lamp or candle was lit in the nearest room; they must have heard me come, I concluded. I rapped, but there was no answer until I was about to announce my presence once more. Then a bolt was lifted and dropped with a loud thud against the door frame, a key turned with a rasping sound; the large door opened cautiously, and I looked and then stared into a pair of eager eyes which seemed to burn amidst the fantastic shadow-play dusk, and candlelight displayed with startling vividness on a rouged face. The thought struck me that Rembrandt or some other master of light effects would have loved to paint the young girl I now beheld in speechless astonishment.

A premeditated joke about the port wine faltered and died on my lips. My face felt uncomfortably flushed, and I could hear my heart pound.

"Oh, here you are," exclaimed my acquaintance of a few hours ago. "I've been waiting for you so long. And what a load you've got! Take it off and rest for a while, won't you? I'll get you a warm drink. Never mind the snow; that's clean dirt!"

"Here's your bottle—you can feel that I kept it warm for you, Miss . . . ?"

"My name is Audrey," she replied. "What may I call you?"

"Just Donn, if you wish."

"Thanks ever so much for bringing the wine. Kind of you, indeed." With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes she continued: "I needed it, of course,

but to be frank with you I really thought of the port wine only as an excuse to get acquainted. Hope you don't mind. I've been so miserably lonesome lately. My aunt left, you know, for Dawson. We didn't get along at all, but now I wish I had gone with her. Why do you stare at me like that, Kid?"

Still confused, I faltered: "Pardon me. Didn't know I did, but you resemble some one once very dear to me."

"That's an old one, Kid, and I've heard it before." She laughed, but her mirth was hard and ironic. "I listen to a lot of mush from men when they are drunk or lovesick—but won't you sit down while I get you something? Are you hungry?" she asked, quickly changing the subject and there was now a gay, mischievous twinkle in her eyes; otherwise I might have taken her remarks less graciously than I did.

"No, thank you," I replied, drawing myself up proudly. "And by the way, I'm not lovesick, and—to be frank like you—I don't give a tinker's damn whether you believe me or not. I'm curious about one thing, though, and maybe you don't mind telling me why you had been crying before I came. I've heard that there is always something worth while about those who are capable of honest tears."

My last remark, with its covert implication, must have either pleased or hurt her, for she was now as guilty of staring as I might have been. I

liked her eyes. They were so frank, and strange to say, innocent and wholesome like those of a child.

"What"—the words came hesitatingly—"what do you mean by saying that?"

With a sharp sting of regret I realized that I should be more considerate. I was her guest, not her patron. And she was, after all, a woman; no, merely a lonely little girl and entitled to as much consideration and chivalry as anybody. Even my pity should inspire that. And how pretty she was, how fascinatingly beautiful. No one as lovely as Audrey could ever escape the admiration of men, and she was too much of a woman not to arouse passion in the coldest of hearts.

Her quizzical eyes held me as I wondered what to say. But in another moment they were swimming in tears, and gone from her face was every trace of anger and professional arrogance.

"Forgive me," I asked her penitently. "I really did not mean to insinuate, to hurt you. I wouldn't do that for all the world. But you must know that many of us are rather conventional or old-fashioned and that we have reasons to be a bit—what shall I say?—skeptical about a certain class of women. I like to believe that you are different, though. Please don't cry, dear. Still, tears are becoming to you, and we all need them at times—I do too."

Quickly, almost as an interruption, she now cried out, her voice rising to a high pitch:

"Why, Kid—Donn—do you really mean what

you said? Yes, you do look different and you sure talk differently too—and you've got kind eyes. Let us be pals, what do you say? I ain't as bad as you might think and I'm sick and scared of the rough-necks around here—I do need you."

She broke into a soft, trembling sob. Then there was a heavy hush. We were both lost in a swirling onrush of thoughts.

Although now several hours overdue and with our cabin another steep and crooked half mile away, I had stopped worrying about being so late. Even during the fervor of our conversation, my eyes had wandered around, dwelling in amazement on the spacious, artistic interior, on the unusual comfort, cleanliness, and homelike arrangement which indicated in every detail the loving care of a woman—and a woman only! A stack of books on a table held a special attraction. I promised myself to find out what they might reveal about the owner's literary taste. There was nothing gaudy nor vulgar about any personal belongings. This fact surprised me, because Audrey's theatrical make-up seemed to affirm her very superficial or primitive tastes. Unless that was part of the role of being a courtesan. . . .

We talked a while longer, now of less pertinent matters, but we were both watching and studying each other intently. There was unconcealed frankness and curiosity in her eyes, also a subtle, unfathomable something which both intrigued and

fascinated me. I believe we were keenly aware of fencing with idle words and also that we enjoyed the subtle thrusts and parries employed to satisfy a mutual interest. When I was about to rise and take leave, she walked over to the window, removed the lamp, and looked out into the newborn, moonlit night, evidently curious about something. Presently I heard quick steps approaching on the crisp, hard-packed snow, and with an intuitive feeling that it was one of my friends, I opened the door and hurried out on the porch. Sure enough, it was Sinclair himself, on his way to look for me, prompted, I thought, not only by hunger, but also by unselfish concern for a close pal. It would be difficult to describe realistically the vividness of his startled face when he entered after I had hailed him. Sinclair was always a man of few words when sober, but this time he proved more taciturn than ever. He had hardly anything but a "yes" or a "no" to our rapid questions and a several times repeated exclamation: "I'll be damned...." when he looked at me with shy twinkles of glee and surprise.

To my amazement Audrey now suddenly made up her mind to persuade me to stay with her. With startling eagerness she began and kept up a skirmish, pleading and arguing with an energy and abandon that seemed incredible. She appealed to me with such forceful, almost desperate means that

I felt myself caught and irresistibly carried away in her own torrent of emotions.

"Just one night for me—can't you spare that much for a lonely little girl who likes you so much—can't you, please!"

My refusal made her only more insistent, more eloquent, and finally even humble and plaintive in her appeal. She also turned to Sinclair and pleaded her case before him with fierce sentimental zeal. He moved about in the room uneasily in obvious discomfort when even I, now just as excited and aroused, asked him to help me convince her how utterly impossible and unreasonable it would be for me to stay. I gave him my many reasons. My friend, however, finding himself cornered and unable to escape, drew himself up proudly, pondered a moment, and then like a Roman of old, pointed his thumb down, thus helping Destiny to steer a ship into a new lane on the turbulent sea of life.

"You'd better stay, Donn," was the laconic opinion of our appointed arbiter.

When the door closed, creaking on its hinges, and the iron bolt again fell noisily into its place, and we—the two of us—were alone, then I felt as if some of the old self-reserve and drilled-in composure had come back into control of my agitated mind—though but for the fleeting moment of a climax. Silently I stood facing her with folded arms and with muscles strained and aching as they

twisted my face into a deep, hard scowl while I tried to conquer the weakness and longing of my heart. Hard, profane words came rushing to my lips but they twitched and trembled silently as I looked upon the lovely woman now standing before me and pleading to be mine, now pressing her thin-clad body against mine, now gently, ever so gently brushing a tear-wet cheek against mine. . . .

I shall never forget the anger and anguish that leaped into her eyes when I asked how much she intended to charge me for one whole night, and when I admitted being broke, always broke! And I can hear and remember almost at will what she said while this storm of elemental desires raged around me and this hapless victim of life. And even through the rouge I could see a little spot of excitement on each cheek—like blood on old ivory. I marveled at her artless and impromptu acting. Her tragedy seemed to grow into something beautiful and artistic, as though it were enacted by a great actress on the stage. One could easily have fancied that Sophocles was telling through her lips a gripping story of some lovely “hetaera” of old Greece. With a note from every scale of the rhapsody of emotions which she could render with such intensity, her voice rose and sank as she continued:

“Donn, Donn, won’t you please listen to me; won’t you try to believe me just this once? I don’t know you yet, that’s true, but I like you, and I’m sure you aren’t as hard and cold as you try to look

now. Oh, don't wrinkle your brow like that! Perhaps I am no angel, but I'm not so bad that you could ever buy my love. If you could buy me, then I wouldn't have cared for you, so you see it makes a difference even to one like me." Here she stopped, and I noticed that her face had suddenly gone white. "Hear . . . hush!" she whispered. "There's someone coming. Shall I let him in, Donn? Or are you going to let me be decent and happy to-night, just this one night with you? You needn't even touch me if you don't want to, only talk to me and listen to me. Hear him rapping on the door now—one of the boys from up the creek, I suppose. I hate them all—always full of booze and always so fresh too, now after hard-boiled aunty left. Not let him in? Oh, Kid, that's so nice of you. Now—oh, sure you must be hungry, aren't you? Sit down over here and be a real good boy."

"Tricky little devil," I thought, but there was also a new song of revolt rising in my heart, defying, challenging old dictates of pride and reason. My hostess hurried while preparing a meal as if her very life depended upon completing it within only a few minutes. Her light, swift steps and the simple, natural grace in the movement of a graceful body was an entralling picture in itself. She radiated happiness and anticipation and when she began to sing while setting the table: "Drink to me only with thine eyes. . . ." with a voice I judged to be not only acceptable, but also quite artistic,

then I capitulated. My most beloved song, my earliest infatuation in music—even an intimate friend could not have chosen one with a stronger appeal to the dreamer in me.

Did I surrender with grace? Arrogant, I know, to claim that I did, but no regrets followed the enactment of this play of fiery passion on a dimly lit stage in the far-flung frontier of the Canadian Northwest—no remorse, though I once called it a peccavi, called it a sin.

18

THE LATE morning sun seeped through long cracks which looked very much like broken pieces of silver thread on the window shutters, still closed. Here and there little knotholes shone as stars on a dark firmament. My head felt light, my mind free of all cares while I mused away in drowsy retrospect the first few minutes after leaving a dreamless sleep. Even when I searched—as I always do when real happy—for some discord, regret, or worry, I could find none. Audrey must have stolen away very cautiously not to waken me, for I sleep lightly. Through the open door I heard a fire crackle as pleasantly as only one of green birchwood can. Light footsteps in slippers or stocking feet and a softly hummed melody thrilled me with a memory but a few hours old. Now and then the sharp clatter of a dish or pan brought thoughts less romantic but just as entralling to my earth-bound soul. Then Audrey's merry and expectant eyes peeped through the doorway and, finding me awake, she shouted a cheerful "Good Morning, lazy

bones!" Before I could return her greeting she had run over to our bed, had knelt down beside it and taken my face in her hands to kiss and caress in a wild, passionate abandon, surrendering completely to her joy. And how good it felt to be loved, and how far away all sordid thoughts were on this first morning we owned together!

To satisfy my curiosity about the natural appearance of her face, I had persuaded Audrey before retiring the night before to wash off her almost barbaric make-up. Now I noticed with a keen thrill that cosmetics had not yet been applied on a skin too lovely ever to be enhanced by art.

Despite our intimacy, Audrey was still very much a stranger, and I regarded her in a distant, almost impersonal manner. My growing interest and fondness I defined merely as an expression of sex and beauty worship. It was always easy for me to kneel in rapture before anything esthetic—much too easy, in fact. But for all that, I could never have chosen a more lovely idol to worship than this incarnation of feminine charms—that I already knew!

There was still some of last night's shadow-play in the room, and the subdued light from the kitchen did not reveal any of the faint but telltale marks of dissipation, showed nothing to mar the appearance of my butterfly love. Like a playful child she quickly jumped up and then dragged me, blankets and all, out of bed and as I rolled down

to the floor, fighting and protesting, she ran over to the window and flung it open. For a moment the dazzling light blinded me, and when I looked up Audrey announced from the kitchen: "Breakfast ready!"

"Are you happy now, Audrey?" I asked after expressing my appreciation of a truly delicious meal. This question, however, voiced my own satisfaction with life in general and her cooking in particular rather than any real altruistic interest.

"Happy—oh, gee!" she exclaimed. "Still I don't know for sure, Donn, because my heart is so full that it hurts; yes, it feels like bursting." After a short pause she continued very slowly but with more emphasis: "I've learnt to be afraid of happiness—it's so damnably hard to wake up and find out that it was something else."

The last remark intrigued me. It was so typical of her manner of expression when in a serious or contemplative mood. I had already caught many intimate glimpses of unmistakable intelligence and honest sincerity. And I was conscious that much of the high barrier between us was breaking down, but as a matter of tact as well as of caution I maintained a distance and politely but firmly refused to answer some very poignant personal questions. First, after having given so much of herself and of her past, she seemed to notice my lack of reciprocation and she voiced her disappointment in no uncertain terms.

After the meal we sat facing each other across the narrow table. A clock had struck several times. The hours traveled swiftly and easily this morning. Audrey continued to do most of the talking. I felt empty of words and only occasionally did I interrupt my hostess.

Unasked, but apparently encouraged by my silent though watchful interest, Audrey told me her story. Her life, which contained several years less than I could claim for my own, had been rather uneventful until after reaching the age of adolescence. She must have matured extremely early, I thought, and it was quite obvious even without her frank admission and my knowledge that nature had also endowed her with such an intensity of passion that it would almost inevitably lead to early acts of indiscretion or worse. With the guidance of sensible parents or with the right man to love much of this tragedy might have been spared her. Her beauty was of that exotic, sensual type which makes men forget, dare, and hurt in the ruthless violence of a desire too strong to control. She made me think with the words of a great poet “... thou who hast the fatal gift of beauty.” When only fifteen she had married a prize fighter. This “gin marriage” represented the culmination of many wild, erotic adventures. At first it pained me to hear the sordid tale, and it stripped her of much romance even if it was colorful and well enough told to render it interesting from a psycho-

logical viewpoint. It also seemed to be in line with the trite and banal therein that her husband proved to be the proverbial, immoral brute with the body of a Greek god—and so on, much like the popular theme in some fiction. Divorce followed in a surprisingly short time and with the usual expediency of American courts.

After giving a lurid description of her meritless husband, she paused for a moment and looked as if lost in memories. I watched her intently. Her eyes had narrowed into dark slits, and her sensitive mouth, always so delicately responsive to emotions, now reflected a mood of bitterness or hatred. I winced at the caustic frankness and cynicism she voiced as a closing comment on her matrimonial adventure:

"I certainly was a real prostitute while married to that beast, regardless of what you and your damn society thinks of 'holy' matrimony!"

This sequence of passion rather than romance, which her marriage had represented, together with some unpleasant family complications, finally resulted in Audrey's seeking refuge with a paternal aunt. This woman had been running a bawdy house in a wide-open milltown somewhere on the West Coast but was at this time looking for a new location. Alaska lured them as it had so many of their kind with its promise of quick wealth. And here in this mansion of the North did this slip of a girl take her first steps into a life of commer-

cialized vice. A month later, or less than a week ago, her aunt had left because they could not get along. Allowing for biased exaggeration, I was convinced that Audrey's relative possessed some of the most vicious and base qualities imaginable even for a woman of her type and profession. Apparently devoid of any sentiment, she had consistently tried to crush Audrey's independent spirit. Her niece, however, proved equal to this siege of mental torture and really came out victorious in the end. With her share of the earnings her aunt left for Dawson, where she intended to establish herself in her old role of a landlady in its red-light district. Audrey claimed that they had become reconciled before the severance of their iniquitous partnership, although I suspected that their tears of parting must have been mixed with mutual sighs of relief. Photographs, letters, and a recent telegram from her mother proved that she was telling me the truth. Her mother's message, by the way, made me realize that brevity surely can be the soul of eloquence. Audrey claimed that her mother was the daughter of an Italian aristocrat, a political exile, which might have accounted for her rather exotic beauty and also for some of the natural grace and artless gentility she revealed when not acting the part of a courtesan.

At first, after hearing part of her confession, I was tempted to ask her to spare me. No matter how interesting, it annoyed me, upset me, as if I

were listening to the tragic fate of someone very near to me. The irrelevant association of so much beauty and tender youth with sordidness and moral weakness was in itself like the painful impact of a blow. And this was the first time in my life that I had been closer than an orchestra seat to a real human drama—entirely too close, in fact, for any degree of pleasure. But as the story went on I grew more interested, and my curiosity about this unusual girl proved too strong for my pre-resolved attitude of reserve.

There were so many brilliant flashes of deep speculations in her comments and they expressed in a simple and unpretentious but often unpleasantly caustic manner her impassive outlook on life.

"All you need, Audrey, is a lot of real love," I commented, stretching my hands across the table and gently seizing hers. "And maybe a deep sorrow or religion or a chance to make a decent living —there surely is the making of a wonderful woman in you, dear."

And now I felt more grateful as I better realized how much she had given another hungry beggar of life. But of all her gifts yet, these intimate gleanings from the scarlet pages of a little novice in "the frail sisterhood" seemed the most precious.

DON'T cry, please!" I pleaded. "Everything will turn out all right, little girl. That's fine—you just keep that smile even if the tears won't stop."

For a long time we remained silent while curious eyes continued their exchange of thoughts too vagarious for words. Soon her old wistful smile returned, and its contrast with the sadness in the still tear-filled eyes seemed to enhance the loveliness of her face with something deeply emotional. There was an absent, brooding air about her, and she looked so pathetically forlorn that my heart ached. Coming over to my seat, she stretched out her hands in a silent request. Deeply moved, I folded them in mine and drew her closer. Her breath came faster, and I could hear her heart pound. When I began to talk she closed her eyes.

"Audrey, you've surely had your share of troubles." My words seemed so empty, and I forced myself to continue, trying to think ahead to avoid hurting one who had already known so much pain. "I have a story too, as you may guess—otherwise I

wouldn't be here with you. Hell to realize that I didn't appreciate what I once had. The kindest thing I could wish you, Audrey, would be that you might meet the right kind of a chap before it's too late—one that could give you the clean, decent love I'm sure you could return. But now you're growing hard—and you know it—the racket makes you, not your heart. Booze and dope and vice are stronger than you, stronger than any of us. God, you're good-looking, Audrey. I suppose you've been told that a thousand and one times—still you're not when you paint yourself like a streetwalker and never when you try to act hard-boiled. You were born to be a lady—not a toughy. I almost hate myself for talking like this to you. Why don't you say something? Tell me to shut up! No? Well, love or not, Audrey, but I think we are both a bit richer for this experience. And there is one thing I like best of all—the fact that I didn't buy your love. I think you're the kind of a girl a fellow could learn to hate as easily as love. You're smiling now just when I'd much rather see you cry. Oh, do tell me to stop."

I did, but not because she requested an end to my long monologue, but because I saw her smile fade and die while large teardrops grew larger, lingered a while, and then tumbled, leaving two glistening trails down her blanched cheeks. More followed and more came to rest like beauty spots on the table cover. My heart urged me to try to comfort her,

but a perverse delight in seeing her cry, seeing her in pain, irresistibly held me back.

She rose, swallowed a sob, and collected herself much sooner than I had expected. With a glow of excitement burning through her tears she came back, put her hands on my shoulders and leaned forward so close that I could feel her quick, warm breath. Slowly, emphatically, and with marvelous intonation her voice gradually rose from a mere whisper to its full, though still natural height. It gave me an unforgettable thrill to realize how easily and quickly I responded to so many colorful shades of emotions during the discourse which followed as a reply and continued confession.

"Donn, gee, but you're innocent!" she blurted out unexpectedly in a strangely chilled and low tone. "Now listen to me. It won't hurt you to hear my yarn, and I don't give a damn if it does! Yes, listen to this, you fool:—" she turned on me almost savagely—"I never give myself to any of those brutes who think they are buying my love with my body, no not one, so help me God! I am bad and maybe traveling on mighty thin ice, taking chances like a gambler, but you haven't the faintest idea how careful I am. As I told you last night, you needn't be afraid of me—I am just as clean as you boast of being. You are really the only one I have taken any chances with, because I like you and trust you. Don't look so surprised, Kid. You don't know everything about me and

my kind—and I suppose you are better off for that! Sometimes I think it's no use trying, but I guess it isn't in the Irish or the Dago of me to give up. I ain't religious; don't even believe in God—never did and never will—but I believe in myself and you can be sure that I'm going to get out of this dirty mess some day. Now listen—I've got about nine hundred dollars saved up and it won't take long before I have enough to go to a theatrical school in Frisco so I can land a job on the stage. All that money, Donn, is under the pillow you slept on. Now, say I don't trust you. . . ."

Preparing for the theatre! Well, many roads lead to Rome, and I had already felt that this fascinating girl with all her beauty, spontaneity, and emotional capacity was predestined for the stage. Granting that she possessed unusual artistic ability, I could even concede that her ambition might justify rather drastic methods and means to bring about its realization. So, she trusted me! The supreme proof of confidence in America is to be trusted with money—I needed no further evidence of faith and it pleased me.

"Audrey," I said, "do you know that I have less than a dollar to my name, in fact, only a few 'cheechaco' coins. I've almost lost hope of ever getting a stake again; haven't got as much as the promise of a job! You sure must trust me, putting a fat roll like that under my pillow. Don't do that

again—you may pick the wrong man another time!"

"Yes," she avowed in a husky, labored voice. "Someday you too might learn not to condemn a woman for something a man isn't even criticized for doing. I'm just as hungry for a home and all that goes with it as you are, Donn—maybe more so...."

Again placing her hands on my shoulders and holding me at an arm's length, she looked at me with a little frown and asked,

"Donn, you never told me your full name—why didn't you—why don't you now?"

"Neither did you, Miss Villari. I just happened to read your mother's telegram so I know. Mine is—oh, what does it matter? I'll always be Donn to you! Look here. My mother embroidered this family crest over my name and I keep it with me all the time as a token of her love."

"Oh, how pretty!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you proud of it? And what a strange name—it sounds so ancient!"

"Yes, it is the proud name of a family that has made history in several countries. Originally French, one branch settled in England, was knighted there and thrived for several generations. But it became necessary to move in a hurry when one of my ancestors happened to choose the losing party during the stormy days of Cromwell. He finally settled in another country and founded a

branch now neither rich nor prominent. We hung on to both the French and the English names although I've dropped one temporarily for the sake of convenience—the French one is so darn hard to spell! And now that you know all about me let's talk about something else!"

With a peculiar but pleased expression she looked at me, then turned and walked over to the fireplace. Slowly, deliberately she stirred the fire. And while she watched the flames and the glowing embers her voice came soft and low as if from far away:

"Thank you for telling me. I do appreciate your confidence. Yes . . . and you'll always be Donn, just Donn, to me."

After another long pause she turned to me again.

"Last night you said if your own sister fell into the gutter you'd pick her up and she'd be just as sweet and dear to you as ever—just as though nothing had happened. Couldn't you feel that way about somebody else's sister too—about me?"

"Yes," I admitted. "That is, of course, if you really meant something to me, as a friend or . . . or . . ."

"Or as a sweetheart, you hesitated to say, didn't you? Too damn good for that, aren't you? And I'm not good enough!" Her words had the sharp edge of a knife but they belied what I could read in her eyes. "Still you sure fell for me, fell hard. Wish I could blush like you—come and look at yourself in the mirror."

Her eyes held me prisoner, and I felt myself in the presence of the very meaning of life, the primal mystery of our physiological origin, and in their burning lustre was the quivering, surging, inexorable urge which commands us to answer the call of the race.

Grasping my hands tightly, she pulled me with all her strength into her bedroom, and there with her bare arms around my neck I looked into the large mirror and saw the flushed face of an excited boy, then into Audrey's eyes, bright and moist and yearning as they searched mine.

Slowly I turned and slowly I bent her yielding body low to kiss and to love.

20

ANOTHER morning greeted us with a little more of sun and spring. A few large boulders and a few small patches of brown and black soil could be seen along the snow-covered rim and slopes of Birch Creek. Spruce, pine, and tamarack had a richer color of green and every tree seemed to have waked from its long winter sleep.

Andrey waited on me as if I were a distinguished guest. Her attention was too sincere and perfect not to be appreciated, although at times, and for reasons of my own, it was disturbing, irritating. Once I voiced my objection to her almost slavish servility in words much stronger than justified or intended. But her eyes only twinkled, and I knew that she could see through my rather affected displeasure. The truth was that the strange experience of being loved and pampered was enjoyed at the expense of self-respect, and I could never completely hush an accusing voice speaking deep within me. There was such a complete acceptance of me as her guest—or more—and my willingness to

take it soon aroused fear of unpleasant consequences. It certainly would not take much to start tongues a-wagging about my intimate relationship with this girl. The very thought of a justly hard name for those who live with or accept the earnings of a prostitute caused chills to travel up and down my spine. No matter how hard I tried, that repellent thought refused to be expelled from my mind. Soon I began to feel extremely worried and ill at ease.

Another day of fullness was drawing to a close. We had just finished dinner. Avoiding Audrey's observant eyes I picked up a book, which, by the way, happened to be Stevenson's *Virginibus Puerisque*, walked over to the window seat and looked out through a clear spot on the frost-painted glass. Low, snow-laden clouds racing toward us from Lake Atlin predicted another storm. I always liked to be out in rain, snow, or storm, and this time the outdoors seemed to beckon and urge as if it held out a promise to still the turmoil now raging in me.

"Where are you going?" inquired my hostess when she saw me put on mackinaw and cap.

"Just for a walk, dear."

"I'm going along. Something is eating you—what's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'll be back soon, but I'm going alone." Again declining her company, I went out and walked quickly up toward a knoll above the road to Atlin—the same one where Audrey had

first seen me. When there and alone with myself, I sat down and searched for a solution to my vexing problems, pleaded and argued with all the emotional frenzy I seem to require in moments of need. At length, large snowflakes began to dance, pirouette, and slowly fall to the ground on the first gentle puffs of the wind. For a long while I watched the storm come closer, erasing mountains and hills and trees until finally even the Vista House was a blurred, shapeless thing.

While returning I prepared myself for what I knew was going to be an ordeal, another cruel blow to the fair frailness of one whom I had already learned to like only too well. I sincerely wished to help and to be kind to her, but from now on merely as a friend. I had no right to sacrifice myself for a fleeting and dangerous passion, for the fickleness of a woman's fancy.

An hour or more must have passed since leaving her house. The door was now locked and barred which surprised me even if I felt that this was only a thoughtful precaution on Audrey's part. It seemed strange, however, that she did not open immediately after I had knocked—strange too that the footsteps I finally heard coming were not as fleet and eager as those I was so accustomed to hear. Agitated and plainly ill at ease, Audrey rushed into my arms, clinging to me tightly.

"Donn... Donn," she said with a quaver of guilt in her voice, "I have a... there is a man I

know in the other room. Won't you, please, wait here a little while? He'll leave right away—oh, why do you look so angry, Donn? He comes here to see me now and then, and I just couldn't refuse him. Please, please. . . ."

Unmerciful blows to tender fancies, to treasured dreams; life's sudden and unexpected disappointments and the many rude awakenings which are measured out so generously to us all, are to me like milestones or landmarks showing where a new thought, a new emotion was born with something of the cleansing misery and pain of childbirth. But I have seldom known the one within me that now faced the mistress of the Vista House. Anger must have leaped into my eyes like a tiger for I felt a savage snarl on my lips. To strike a woman—what a contemptible thing to do; yet I have known times when I could, and this was one! But my anger died as suddenly as it had come, and none of it lingered while I looked upon my little scarlet-marked girl and said nothing, not one word. Why should I feel even resentment? Why had I allowed myself to change reality, the abject reality of the Vista Loghouse, into an illusion of romantic make-belief, when I always knew why she was here and why men came here with money and desires. Silently we stared at each other, startled and stunned by the blow of a revelation so unexpected and so cruelly disappointing that it seemed unreal. I had nothing to tell Audrey, only a final goodbye.

I wanted her, wanted the sweet, youthful loveliness that was hers in such abundance, but this time the will to leave her was stronger. No intolerant feeling of bigotry or pride was associated with the thought that I was not her kind, she was not mine —could never be!

"Why don't you say something, Donn?" she cried out, her pitched voice now broken by hysterical sobs. "Donn, I know I shouldn't have done it while you were here; I felt it, but don't you understand how it is? I'm doing this, dear, because I want to get out of this hell. Oh, don't be angry with your poor little friend—won't you try to forgive me just this once? I'll do anything, oh, anything, if you promise not to leave me. You can have all my money, all I've got, everything!"

I hardly heard what she said. It was as if a stranger were talking to someone else. All I now thought of was the man in the other room—only of him and not of her—even while sobs shook her slender body, while her wild hands stroked me, clutched at me, and then locked themselves like bands of steel around my neck. With a cool deliberation which I never imagined myself capable of mastering, at least not during an emotional climax, I refused to yield.

What a pathetic object of compassion, what a touching tragedy personified in Audrey, in her truly incomparable charm and beauty and in the heart-rending incongruity of its defilement! This

grim scene should have been enacted on the stage. And I wished with cruel selfishness that I too could have been below the footlights to see her in all her tragic glory. It was part of her beauty as well as the woman and the actress in her that she could change her face so suddenly from almost sullen immobility to the most vivid expressions of emotions. How effectively lights could have played in the rich gloss of her hair and enhanced the graceful lines of a limp, sylphlike body! The thought struck me that the most demanding critic would have praised the dramatic art in her sobs, in her voice, and in the silent eloquence of every move and gesture. Her groping, trembling hands were like spoken words, and I noticed how white and beautifully kept they were. Perhaps an audience watching us now, for the sake of another thrill if not for art, might also have enjoyed how roughly I broke her embrace and flung her from me.

Descending the steep hillside above our cabin during a snowstorm was a task no sensible or sober person would willingly undertake. Sudden gusts of the snow-laden air often blinded me and made me stop and turn to avoid their fury. Still I liked it because the storm was in full harmony with the madness in my own breast. My new memory dogged my footsteps like a haunting spectre. First I thought that I could soon forget that another man was staying with Audrey after I had left; forget that one thing of all, but it rapidly became the

centre around which the whole affair insisted upon revolving. I wondered how long he had stayed, wondered if she had permitted him to remain over night, wondered if she had given herself to him completely, fully! That man seemed an agent of a just fate, yet deep down in my heart I hated him as I had never hated a man before.

Maclarens familiar snoring greeted me as I opened the door of our cabin. For once it sounded as if it had a note of friendship and home in it. Stealthily, as the proverbial thief in the night, did I return. No fear of consequences or scruples of conscience, however, kept me from intentionally waking my friends. Such acts as mine were accepted and approved as perfectly normal and would not be subject to any criticism. Even the jokes and friendly sarcasm I might inspire would soon be forgotten—such are the unconventional ways of men in Alaska.

Ed, whom I suspected of being awake, moved over to give me room in the narrow bed we shared, but that was the only apparent welcome extended to the returning “prodigal son.”

MACLAREN and Sinclair finally obtained work in the mine belonging to the saloonkeeper who had caused such embarrassing drain of our funds while in Juneau. It is, indeed, difficult to pass judgment on our acts, even those of obvious folly, until the full consequences are known. Now I secretly wished that I had spent my last dollar in that saloon, getting acquainted and perhaps also drunk, providing, of course, that the outcome would eventually have resulted in profitable contact with manual labor. Some of my resolutions pertaining to conduct and general behaviour were already suffering defeat due to such unromantic facts as a ravenous appetite and my share of a large store bill. Living close to nature requires money, and lots of it, even in Alaska. Hunting and trapping I found to be professions as highly specialized as those of any skilled artisans. My physical handicap for certain practical tasks, including mining, soon became so evident to me by observance and comparison, that I was forced to make some very un-

comfortable adjustments. But even if disagreeably hard work for a daily wage seemed unavoidable in order to exist, the lure of prospecting soon moulded my mind into a fixed state of delusion, and before long I knew the rapture of a deception which rules the minds of every true Alaskan. The lure of gold, the enticing hope of striking it rich, might be false as the devil's own hoax, yet it is an incentive which seldom wanes, an infatuation which burns with a passion the years can only make more fiery, more realistic. Most of us build happiness upon such deceptive, imaginary things!

Less than a mile upstream from our cabin lived a woman, the owner and operator of one of the richest placer mines in this neighborhood. I had pieced together a mental picture of her from the many tales I had heard of her colorful past. Stories recording contemporary events had it that she was being ardently courted by a middle-aged miner, and the interesting feature of that normal happening in the lives of those free to entertain matrimonial ties was the apparent incongruity that any man would or could fall in love with old lady Brown. It surprised me how eloquent even tongue-tied men could grow on the subject of her ugliness, on the fine points of a forbidding countenance, and the still more lurid conjectures, rather than the proven facts, in a supposed drama in which it was claimed she had figured. A few years ago her husband, a man liked, respected, and pitied, disap-

peared under peculiar circumstances and, considering the reputation of his wife, it was almost a logical conclusion that she was to become the target of suspicion and ugly accusations. We still burn witches in our day and age, only in a more refined manner, although for the same age-old reasons. My opinion was that old man Brown had changed name and identity and sought some well-deserved freedom in a country where it is so easy to vanish without first becoming a corpse.

One day when it was Ed's turn to cook, I decided to call on this new object of curiosity. Her cabin was at the mouth of a rather inaccessible gulch diagonally across the creek from the mine where my partners worked. The creek was already running swiftly in a narrow and deep channel through the snow. The water looked black as ink against the white sides of its crooked course and did not seem to permit fording without the toll of a plunge. I managed it, but my feet were wet and cold when a few minutes later I stood shivering outside Lady Brown's sumptuous log cabin. The gulch to my right led like the beginning of a road westward to the mountains. They loomed deceptively close through the V-shaped opening and this was one of the few places where even the highest peaks were visible to us dwellers in the deep creek.

Now a dog barked inside the cabin, announcing my presence before I had a chance to knock, and

presently the door was opened by the lady who had inspired so many tales. An exclamation of: "No wonder!" almost slipped over my lips as I looked into her unfriendly eyes. Hers was indeed a face that could fit into any nightmare. The grace and beauty of another woman flitted like a phantom before me and it left a dull, insistent ache in my heart. What a contrast in appearance, I thought; still they both had other things in common which were just as grim and repellent as the hard, haggard face of Lady Brown.

While walking up to the cabin from the place where I had forded the creek, I had noticed a number of coal oil cans filled with black sand, and black sand always means gold where such a high percentage of the yellow dust is wasted as in Atlin. So I proposed to widow Brown that the two of us should enter into a partnership, business to be limited in time and character to recleaning her black sand. My proposition must have been well presented or otherwise acceptable because to my surprise she consented, and the deal was soon closed over a steaming cup of coffee. Part of the second part, that is, my humble self in the verbal contract, was to perform all labor incidental to cleaning the black sand, and one half of all gold recovered would be her share. Work was to be done on her premises.

This was my first actual engagement in placer mining. My share for two weeks' work amounted

only to about twenty-five dollars, but I had also developed a real ability to pan, which was the laborious method I employed. My friend Ed was skeptical about the deal with Lady Brown, and he did not offer to assist. That he regretted his action after seeing the result of the first day's panning was part of my remuneration, and I continued to enjoy his apparent chagrin. For the same reason I postponed giving him any money for several days after the job was finished. When I finally handed him a full half of my hard-earned wealth, I was completely restored to his good graces, and we actually ceased to quarrel for a week or more.

Only in fancy, only in roaming thoughts, did I climb the steep trail over the hill to the Vista House. On many late evenings, when mood and longing prompted me, I used to cross the creek, climb a large boulder on a low ridge and sit for hours under the winter-wilted branches of an old tree, dreaming in twilight which always lingers with such incomparable softness long into the nights of the north. Not even to myself did I ever admit that my impetuous heart was urging and pleading and that sense and pride were capitulating in the unequal struggle.

One night I did not ford the creek for my customary nocturnal stroll, but followed the old trail which to my mind led to only one place in the world. It was quite dark, and a chilling fog was spread like a thin, fluffy blanket over the ground

between boulders and tailing-piles. I felt miserably blue, having just had a most unpleasant quarrel with one of my partners. The discord of sarcastic laughter was still ringing in my ears, and I wished myself far away—though not yet as far as to the Vista House. The gibe and banter had been unusually merciless this evening, and it had finally centred around Ed and myself as chief participants. I had been very irritable all day, and this was seized upon by my partners as a welcome opportunity to break the monotony with a spirited argument and quarrel. Never before had my longing for Audrey, for her friendship or love been so strong. I needed her, and it seemed that everything in me but my voice called and begged her to come. Could it be possible, I wondered, that a message can be sent to another person in the form of a thought wave? Will it find its course through the spheres when raised to a certain emotional pitch? Must we not feel and think to the point of agony or ecstasy before it is released from the shackles of the consciousness to soar into the freedom of the unknown realms of mind and thus reach a reciprocal soul? Could it be that Audrey was thinking of me now?

I stopped at the foot of the hill. I had no intention to continue further even if the desire to do so tugged violently at my heartstrings. Only a few minutes had passed when light footsteps descending the trail made me turn and I saw almost

directly above me a woman's long skirt and coat swing gracefully in rhythm with swift steps. The misty darkness was hiding her features even from a very short distance, still I knew it was Audrey, coming as if in answer to my mute message. All I shall ever remember, or ever care to remember, for that matter, of this unexpected meeting will be the sudden release of all strain, of all despair and loneliness when she slowly sank down beside me in the snow, still in my embrace, and without a word to voice what we felt. Only when I heard her weep, felt the shoulders of her little body quiver in abandonment to a happiness which only tears can express, did I find words to comfort and explain. I hated myself for adding new pain by voicing some of my hard, accusing thoughts, but they were too strong to control even among all this tenderness. Some can never love without hurting, at least I never could.

Neither of us tried to beg or to plead. We both realized and accepted—or thought that we did—the conclusive strength of the many reasons against a more serious affair of love. We talked until darkness became almost impenetrable, and then parted in a friendly, yet awkwardly strained manner. She firmly declined my offer to escort her home.

"Better not, don't you think," she said.

The peculiar ring of both pride and gentleness in her low voice gave me a lump in my throat which was hard to swallow. With a few faltering

and empty words I agreed, although I felt ashamed of myself for doing it.

Audrey told me that during the day she had felt extremely anxious about me and that this concern had finally become so compelling that not even fear of darkness or the difficult trail could stop her from coming. The thought of this and its possible indication of a stronger affection and mental kinship haunted me for days. It seemed, so to speak, that I had held a magic crystal up to the light and seen into the future.

The following day Ed went to work on Gold Creek.

22

WHEN Maclaren returned from work one evening a few days later, we were the only remaining members of the original quartet because Sinclair, who had gone to the trading post to pay our overdue store bill, was to be accounted for. Maclaren voiced the belief that he might have stayed at the Vista House and would probably show up during the evening. He also added that he knew of others having been detained there—alluding, of course, to me. I hated him for saying it, and I again felt some of my suppressed bitterness against Audrey kindled into a wild flame.

"Oh, shut up!" Then I added less audibly: "Damn her anyway. Wish I had never seen the wench!"

I do not believe that my tall, ungainly friend heard this vehement remark. Somehow I was unable to understand my temperamental and impetuous attitude toward one who had revealed to me so many secrets of passion. She was now the cause of a constant conflict within me, and all my

efforts to sever these irritating thoughts from my mind were in vain. I felt myself under the strain of suspense and often wished that I could choose a definite course. Idleness aggravated the discord and neither writing nor reading helped any. And I suppose that the arrival of nature's mating season did not calm my rapturous heart. I had promised this enchanting Magdalene to call on her soon, but neither one of us had dared to voice anything definite at the last meeting, fearing that the fabric of our tender yearning would be torn and slashed even by exposing to each other the hard reality of her life. I was then too uncertain about myself and her to stake it all on one card by asking that she quit her repulsive trade. But we must both have realized that upon that paramount issue hung the fate of our enamoured hearts. Now or never should this be decided, I told myself, especially with this incident bringing it to another crisis. "Could it be possible that Sinclair was staying with her?" I asked myself. I had warned Audrey against him for a certain reason, and I felt reasonably sure that she would be on guard. Both Maclaren and Sinclair might be with her now—should I not go there and face it? "No," said an emphatic voice to the question of my heart, and once more was that inevitable climb up to the Vista House postponed.

Maclaren had not asked me to come along when he left. It surprised and annoyed me even if I would have declined. Strange, indeed, how every

little thing connected with that place of beauty and sin could irritate me with such uncontrollable strength.

When Maclarens finally returned I had spent several hours pouring hard words into my receptive diary. I did not inquire about Audrey, and when my friend volunteered the information that there was nobody at the Vista House, which I took to include Sinclair as well as other visitors, I immediately changed the subject from that location. We were much worried about our missing partner even if it was not revealed in our conversation. Finally Maclarens blurted out:

"If that damn fool isn't home in the morning, Donn, you'd better go in to the post and find out what's happened. No doubt he's on a drunk."

Merely to have our mutual suspicions expressed relieved us. We knew well enough that Sinclair must have plunged into one of his periodical spells of intoxication, and that if he ever needed a friend it was now. I promised to do my best to find him.

The window shutters were still closed when early next morning I arrived at the Vista House. It looked inhospitable and deserted, looked something like what I often felt toward the mistress of that formidable mansion of logs. With clenched fists and cheeks burning from the fiery tumult in my blood, I walked up on the porch, and there by the door which had once opened and closed on a

memory never to be forgotten, I fought another battle with the fierce longing in my heart.

The heavy morning fog was now slowly rising on currents of warm air. Some of it hovered as tufts and balls of cotton only a few feet above me, and the early sun, which had just climbed over the hills in the east, was sending bright beams of light through rifts in the cloud banks. Little patches of clear sky looked like daubs of blue color splashed on a painting of grey and white—the immaculate white of snow and the neutral grey of fog and clouds. Suddenly a narrow but sharply defined sunbeam, resembling an immense, transparent bar of glistening silver dust, touched the roof of the stately building and quickly moved on along the road toward Atlin. Fascinated, my eyes followed its gleaming trail and for a moment it took me away from myself as visions of beauty always do.

“Damn her, damn it all!” broke the ugly notes of discord into the morning song of a bird. A few minutes later I was descending the oblique course of the trail through Dead Man’s Gulch.

Gold Creek must have been visited by spring long before it came to us. Most of the snow was gone; only the soiled remnants of large drifts remained like dots and patches in the broad valley. The low, rounded hills were still clad in snow, except in spots more exposed to sun and wind. A small sawmill, located at the east end of this one-street trading post, was in operation, and the hard,

grating, buzzing noise did not seem as unpleasant as I had known it to be; in fact, there was a melody of many fond reminiscences in it.

The mining season had just commenced. Teams were freighting supplies, men moved busily about, and from a large machine shop came the rhythmic blows of hammers. A few yards from the sawmill was the headquarters of Hill's Mining Company, Limited. It occupied a considerable portion of the whole trading post, that is, some three or four buildings and several large sheds in addition to the sawmill. Ed was working either here or across the creek, but I did not stop to inquire or look around, hoping to have more time for that after finding our missing friend.

The first large log house was a saloon, and so was the next edifice of logs across the street. A number of small cabins occupied the next hundred yards or so, and then the broad street came to an abrupt end with another large building which housed a saloon, the post office, and the one and only store. In other words, it was the social and commercial centre of the town. There I steered my steps, and soon stood facing the blank stare of our erstwhile creditor. My reception was not as cordial as a "paid-up" customer might expect, and I instantly felt very uncomfortable in his physically august presence. I had a hunch that something—and that could be only one thing—was wrong. Yes, Sinclair had not been there, and consequently our account

was still unpaid. I stammered, stuttered, and blushed while wishing myself outside and alone, so that I could think it over.

"So you say your partner came to pay the bill," he drawled scornfully, with a sour grin. "Hm, didn't you? Hm—Hm, several days ago, you said. Hm, are you so sure of that? Well, you boys better get busy and pay up. No more grub from me."

And so on until I did not even listen to his variations of the same theme of "no more credit" and his utter disbelief in my story. Finally I managed an undignified escape, and it was a relief just to be out in the cool air. With the exception of a couple of houses where hard-looking women were plying their hard trade, I knew of only three or possibly four places where Sinclair might be found. Hesitatingly I entered through the wide, open door of the nearest establishment. A short and conventionally stout German was tending bar, and he greeted me with a smile, more sickening than persuasive. Before inquiring, I looked into the large, low-ceilinged back room, but the lone man playing, or rather practicing pool, was not Sinclair.

"Do I know Sinclair? Sure I do," said the bartender. "Fine fellow, you bet. Hell of a good sport too. Was here last night with the crowd. They sure had a good time."

He continued before I had a chance to ask more pointed questions:

"The boys left late, but I don't think Sinclair

was with them then. He was pretty soused, you see, because he got liquored up a couple of days ago and never sobered up since. Have a drink, eh?"

This information was certainly worth a little something out of my few remaining "black sand" dollars, so I nodded my approval. I was now to see for the first time in actual operation a system which undoubtedly must be unique, and, I believe, one of the most efficient methods ever conceived for the purpose of increasing consumption of liquor. The lone pool player was first called out to the barroom. No introduction was offered or solicited, only the usual abbreviated greeting "Howdo" was exchanged. Three glasses were placed before the three of us and generous portions of whiskey poured in. "Here's luck!" The raw, undiluted liquor burnt its way down my unaccustomed throat. I recovered even without a "chaser" of water, although not very gracefully, judging by the laughter which followed.

A drink here—and in every saloon in the whole district, for that matter—was always one for every man present, which, of course, included the bartender. While thinking of what might have happened if more patrons had been present or expensive drinks had been served, I even forgot my mission for a moment.

In the next saloon came the latest tidings of our wayward friend. The open-hearted saloonkeeper, who fortunately for my purse was alone, also in-

formed me that Sinclair owed his establishment about fifty dollars for liquor. He suggested that a search around the sawmill might reveal Sinclair's present voluntary place of refuge rather than rest; in fact, he was positive that a sawdust pile had been my friend's roofless abode for several nights.

There was no thought of resentment or even criticism in my mind. I was certain that neither Maclaren nor Ed would voice a hard word or feel any trace of bitterness toward our mutual friend. The money was his, and so was his life to waste or save as he might see fit to do. It was all part of the game in an existence where violent happenings and sudden vicissitudes are accepted as an irresistible, irrevocable necessity.

Life makes many proselytes to the doctrine of fatalism among men like us. At times I think that most of us are eventually converted. These relevant meditations followed me to where tall pines hovered above the same sawmill I had passed an hour or so ago. As it happened I arrived there just as the man in charge and his two assistants were leaving for lunch. I resisted the temptation to ask them any questions relative to one who might be their uninvited guest, although I did not fear any unpleasant complications in that respect, because in the North hospitality is an unwritten law of the land and always observed. Even from a distance the high pile of fresh sawdust looked comfortable and inviting to one like myself who had known so

many strange places of nocturnal retreat. The sun was baking the lower side facing the creek, and the slowly rising steam was reminiscent of the sleepy warmth of mornings in the hobo jungles of Washington.

And here I found Sinclair, Tony Sinclair himself in his best clothes, looking so deeply contented, so completely relaxed as only a child or a drunkard can be in the embrace of sleep or stupor. I stopped, I faltered as I looked with a rush of kind emotions, the kindest, tenderest I could ever feel, on a pal dwelling so happily in the land of peace and dreams. Tony, Tony—what could it be that always drove you, the calm, lonely dweller in a seemingly tranquil world of introspection, to seek at every opportunity such violent flights into the mad, whirling intensity of intoxication? Perhaps it was some sort of a mental necessity and fully worth the price he paid, worth it despite even the horrid nervous reactions and disorders which followed—who knows? Failures, moral as well as social, breed complexes which may appear as agents of destruction, but in reality serve the purpose of correcting by bringing the issues to a necessary crisis. Nature has its own and not always painless way of maintaining mental equilibrium. Sinclair, clean, honest, and intelligent, was not the sole transgressor as I saw it. He had been cheated, robbed, and fooled, and now he was disappointed like all the rest of

us, only he felt it more deeply in the loneliness of the walled-in realm of a shy, sensitive soul.

I often used to wonder what Sinclair could see with those deep-set, brooding eyes which also were so compelling and eager and kind. He was an extreme radical, but his social views were those of one who lived and worked and fought for his fellowmen. Had he already realized that no house built by man can be set in perfect order? Was that now wrecking his own? "*That which a man loves the most shall in the end destroy him.*" I sat wondering about my friend until I heard that the mill crew had returned. Even then I hated to wake him—he needed more sleep.

This was a time when I felt myself come close to Sinclair, and I sensed a mysterious flow of kinship in thoughts as we walked arm in arm homeward. I did not begrudge him that he had escaped, or satisfied, though only for a day or two, his hunger for home, love, and all those gentler yearnings of man which make life worth living—I almost envied him. When we passed the Vista House Sinclair broke the long silence.

"Don't take any woman too seriously, Donn," he said. "She'll sure break you if you do."

He stopped, then looked searchingly at me with his heavy eyes. Plainly disappointed when my response was only a shrug, he went on in his usual low but now so tired voice:

"I suppose you're wondering why I get drunk

like this. Well, I'll tell you. First, because I'm a damn fool; second, because of a pretty little jane I fell for last winter down in Seattle. I gave her all I had, and then she gave me the gate. Now I'm sick of everything—sick of the whole mess. I think that most of us drink just to forget."

He ended with a gesture that looked grimly significant.

"Yes, Tony, you're right—I know I would. But as far as that girl in there is concerned I believe she's on the level. I do like her. Life's been tough on her, too. She's taught me a lot, and I'll never judge her kind same as I used to."

We did not stop at the Vista House. Audrey must not have seen us pass, but the sudden thought that she might have deliberately ignored me stabbed my heart. I was again made to realize how extremely sensitive and irritable I was about her.

Maclarens was home when we returned. He was in high spirits, but I suspected that his humorous sallies and merry laughter were merely expressions of a friend's attempt to make it easier for a friend. The fact that neither a word nor a smile came from our brooding companion did not discourage him.

While having breakfast the following morning, Maclarens informed us in his usual matter-of-fact manner that he was going in to the post.

"That's fine," remarked Sinclair, "but don't get drunk like myself or fall in love like Donn. And, by the way, I'm going back to work this morning."

Maclarens went in alone and returned late in the afternoon. Later we learned that he had paid our store bill.

THE TIMID beginning of a beard, a fair-sized, untrimmed moustache, and the usual ill-fitting working clothes of a miner, were the only features of my make-up which gave me any self-confidence when I finally made up my mind to ask Mr. Hill for a job. The obvious handicap of my normal appearance had always been great, but I knew it was still more so in this country of pick-and-shovel work. The telltale fairness of soft skin was safely buried under a color of brown, so well and so liberally applied by sun and elements that it resembled a coat of dirt.

Faint at heart but grimly determined, I stole away one morning without waking my companions. It was still the deep, silent dusk of early dawn when I passed the Vista House. How dark and heavy with gloom it looked! The proud structure stood there lonely and forbidding like some old frontier stronghold, and no panorama had yet been rolled up to place it in its usual setting of scenic beauty. I stopped only for a few mo-

ments. Calm had followed the long turbulence in my mind. It was strangely pleasing to be my old self again, despite my growing tenderness and solicitude for the one who dwelled and ruled within a temple of logs where I too had learned some of the rituals of love. When I turned to continue on my way I could hear huskies howl over on Gold Creek, faintly and far away, but vibrant with a plaintive note which seemed to voice the grey melancholy of the dying night. I felt with something of both a thrill and a chill that it was in tune with a new song in my own heart.

Mr. Hill consented, or rather condescended, to engage me. Ed's intervention in my behalf must have offset my utter lack of experience in mining, not to mention the disappointment this labor tyrant registered when his peculiar eyes appraised my physique. I shall never forget those eyes. My father used to claim that there is always something wrong with the eyes of dangerous or dishonest people—much for the same reason, he said, as a rattlesnake is equipped with rattles. My impression was that either eye could be focused independently without the effect of being cross-eyed. They were also crafty and intelligent, in harmony with facial characteristics.

"You don't look like a miner," observed my interrogator in closing the interview. "What's your real trade? Let me see your hands. Hm—maybe you're telling the truth. Remember I'm

the boss around here and don't forget that I can't stand radicals and college boys—watch your steps, son." The ghost of a smile—or a grin—played around his mouth.

While homeward bound I felt too uncomfortable to pay much attention to the interesting activity around the camp. The mining season was in full swing even if spring remained a bit laggard in its strides.

Less than a mile from town, where the road turns and runs straight long enough to make one realize how crooked it actually is, I saw Audrey come running toward me, her long, wide skirt flaring as if waving a greeting, her arms outstretched. Lonely and dejected, I could have shouted a welcome to almost any acquaintance, but the surprise to see Audrey stopped and silenced me. Another moment and I looked at the same hesitating but expectant smile and glance which to me seemed to reveal the gentle, modest self otherwise hidden under the masque of professional frivolity. The blouse under her open high-collared fur jacket was daringly tight-fitting over the full bust and cut almost in line with the breasts, still her dress seemed only to augment the proud poise with a brutal frankness so contrasting to her demure manners. There was again only one thought, only one desire, ruling me with its sweet tyranny as I caught and held this lovely slip of a girl in my arms, only

the one to have her, to love her—a moment or an age.

"How did you know I was here?" I asked.

"Oh, I keep track of you," she answered with a shy little smile. "Went down to your cabin this morning, and finding nobody about, I guessed you'd gone in here to look for a job or something. Donn, listen! Come home with me, and let's talk things over. Gee, how lonesome I've been for you. Why are you staying away, Donn? Tell me, are you really afraid of me or don't you care at all for me?"

The last words were spoken in a voice growing deep and labored. Mine would have been a heart of stone not to have been carried away by a fierce rush of suddenly released emotions, akin to hers, strong as hers.

"Audrey, dear, honest, I couldn't do anything else but stay away," I said in a bitter tone. "Yes, I was afraid of you and myself and everything. I'll be frank with you and admit that I like you too much—too damn much! It can't go on like this, and you know it."

I felt as if my heartbeats were measuring the time during the pause that followed.

"You're right, Donn, it can't go on like this," I finally heard her say. "I do like you, I even—even—more—than—just like you—I'll do anything to prove it." More controlled, more eager, she went on: "Listen, dear. I've made some money lately,

selling liquor and putting up travelers. My place was a regular roadhouse last week, but I'm getting worried and afraid it won't last long." Her voice had a sharper note as she continued: "Last night one of the stool pigeons from Atlin came to see me. The dirty rat acted nasty, threatened and raved until I shut him up with a hundred-dollar bill. Wouldn't be a bit surprised if he'd be back in a week or so and I just couldn't make money fast enough to feed it to him that way. On top of all this they doubled my rent, so you can understand how I have it. Do you know that I pay at least twice as much as you would for booze, groceries, and everything else? They've got the cheek to call it delivery charges on the bills. There isn't a soul here—unless it's you—that wouldn't strip me clean of every cent I have or make. Let's go away, far away—where no one knows us."

We had left the road, and the foot trail was now for a short stretch too narrow and rough to permit an uninterrupted conversation. I walked ahead, and when we reached the gulch where the trail widened, her arm again slipped into mine, and she continued:

"You look so surprised, Donn. Well, maybe you can understand me better now. I've got to be hard, because that's part of the dirty game. Did you ever stop to consider that?"

I was rather startled by her revelations. Of late

I had avoided even thoughts about matters of this nature, and she knew that I resented the unpleasant topic.

"Understand, yes," I replied, "but what you told me only proves that I'm right. You've got to get out of it, Audrey, you've got to, or it will sure break you—break me, too. But I can't go now. I haven't a cent to my name, and I couldn't accept any money from you. Oh, let's talk about something else. . . ."

Despite the sincerity and strength of my interest in Audrey, there was, nevertheless, something extremely unpleasant in it, something I feared, the spectre of which dogged my footsteps and was closer to me than the girl by my side. Hers was an entirely different and almost brutally tolerant outlook on life. My opinions were based upon accepted theories and conventional creeds, hers upon actual experiences, and she could not help but sense the obvious weakness in many of my arguments even if she could not refute them in a convincing manner. I had the feeling that she firmly believed she could eventually convert me, and that she was quite willing to bide her time. She had already forgiven herself, so nothing really mattered so much. There was a philosophical background to her life; more, in fact, than I dared to claim for myself.

In order to be ready to start work on the following morning as arranged, it would have been necessary to be back on Gold Creek that same evening,

but I compromised with Andrey and with my conscience to the extent of postponing the disagreeable event for another day. I trusted to luck and some good "white lie" to account satisfactorily for another day of freedom—or license.

LISTEN, dear, isn't there someone outside?"

I really could not account satisfactorily even to myself why I so suddenly felt that somebody must be standing out on the porch. Once before I had had occasion to marvel at Audrey's faculty of perceiving rather than actually hearing footsteps and voices of those passing by her house even at a considerable distance. This time, however, she had not heard anything, and she laughed quite derisively at my apparently unfounded suspicion.

"Just your nerves, Donn," she chided me lightly, "or are you jealous again? They don't all stop here, you know. Forget it! The devil himself would have a tough job getting in without our permission."

Yes, I could concede to that, because the door certainly looked massive enough to protect effectively against almost any intruder. Both the window shutters and this one and only entrance to the house were also provided with heavy iron bolts and it would take much time and effort to break into

this log fortress. This feature of safety must have compensated to some extent for its utter lack of modern conveniences, at least from a lone woman's viewpoint.

We continued eating our evening meal in silence. Playful currents of air, sudden gusts of unaccountable origin—although I suspected the huge chimney—played with the candlelights on our table, and there were weird and crazy shadows trembling and swaying on the walls. No matter how hard I tried to shake my feeling of apprehension, some imperceptible spectre of fear still haunted me. But just as I was about to open up a conversation in an attempt to break the heavy silence before it changed into gloom, a low but plainly audible sound of moving feet stopped me. My fork clattered noisily against a plate when my hand instinctively tightened its hold.

"Hush...." I said in a whisper suddenly made tense. "I was right; somebody's out there. Who do you think is snooping around? Can it be that rat of a half-breed?"

Audrey had also heard it, and her face became hard and drawn. Her eager eyes gleamed with excitement. When the large brass door handle, which held little scintillating stars of reflected light from the candles and now was the most distinctive part of the door, slowly, cautiously turned, I saw Audrey's hand reach quickly down into an inside pocket of her underskirt. I rushed up just as she

pulled out a dark but gleaming object as she rose from her chair. A revolver—a Browning of very small make—I noticed. I did not know she was armed, although I now recalled that she had often hinted at being well prepared to defend and protect herself against anybody; yes, even against such men as Half-breed Jim. My first impulse was to take the weapon away from her, but something held me back. Right or wrong, we would, for obvious reasons, be seriously if not fatally handicapped before any court, and even self-defense can have moral aspects unpleasant to present before any judge or jury. These pertinent thoughts flashed through my mind only during the merest fraction of a moment —there was no time for reflections now. Audrey tip-toed over to the door and listened with her ear pressed against it. I forgot law, gun, and other speculations as I joined in her vigil. Soft, cautious footsteps could be heard moving around, a creaking board on the porch sounded a warning of menace and then followed a silent suspense which seemed ominous just because of its tenseness. . . . Without speaking to me, Audrey drew back a few inches, kicked at the door violently and shouted:

“Beat it, you, or I’ll plug you!”

She stopped in the middle of another inarticulate word when heavy raps shook the door like vicious blows from an arm with the strength of a giant. Seizing Audrey in my arms, I tried to take the gun

before she could use it, but she wrenched herself free.

"Leave it to me...." Audrey turned on me almost threateningly. "I know how to handle a rod a damn sight better than you do."

I am quite sure that the words she now spoke, not very loudly, but with a hard, hissing sound from between clinched and bared teeth, penetrated the massive thickness of the door better than would the loudest scream:

"Cut that out," she ejaculated. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

Husky and deep-throated, but very distinctly, came the answer:

"Never mind what I want, girlie. Open the door, or I'll bust it in."

"Like hell you will—beat it!"

The reverberating noise from another vicious bang lingered and echoed in the dark nooks and corners before it finally died somewhere in the big house. Despite my concern rather than fear about the outcome of this adventure, I could not help but observe in an almost objective manner the strange actions of a girl who was still a stranger to me. Intimacy had not yet lifted the masque from the true features of her soul; she was still a creation of my fancy and passion.

The rage of a killer now flashed in her defiant eyes as the hand holding the gun dropped until it pointed to the threshold. And when it then cracked

sharply, angrily, once, twice, in quick succession, I felt the explosions like violent blows on my ears. It seemed in perfect keeping with the eerie nature and tenseness of this scene that a wolf or a malamute howled in the near distance. Besides making my flesh fairly creep with chills, this call with its plaintive almost sobbing note all but helped my taut nerves and racing heart. For a moment I was too excited to think clearly, but after the firing came a quick regression to normal calm. Swiftly running feet could be heard even on the cushion of soft snow, and I was sure that there must have been many threats and vile curses in the torrent of incoherent words which first boomed and then died somewhere out in the stillness of the wintry night.

Throughout this scene Audrey could have been likened to a tigress ready to kill, and she both frightened and surprised me with the primitive violence of her passions. The scope of her soul was much wider than I had ever imagined: she could love but she could also hate—hate enough to kill. How quiet it was after the turmoil! The silence seemed even deeper as a contrast to the violent discord, and I now cringed and shivered as if cold and gloom and mystery had enveloped us. The strong gun smoke irritated and pinched my nostrils. Audrey's limp hand laid the gun in mine, and then she pressed her face against my shoulder and asked me to hold her. Her flaming cheeks had gone white, and the muscles around her mouth quivered and

twitched. And before I had regained full grip on my own nervous self I held a weeping, agitated, and even frightened woman in my arms. Gone was all her courage and her marvelous self-reliance. Still I wondered, as I looked at her, if I did not love her more now, if I did not feel more akin and attuned to the forlorn, lonely, and pleading slip of a girl whom I hugged and caressed in an awkward attempt to comfort.

"No, Audrey," I assured her gently, "that man isn't ever going to come back. He'll run a long, long way after the scare you gave him, and I bet he'll run if he ever sees you again, gun or no gun. I shan't leave you tonight, dearest, sweetest. . . ."

I attended to her as well as I knew how, but without much success. Finally a glass of port wine proved to be the right medicine for my unnerved patient. Hard as I tried, I could not persuade her to retire. The night was too young, she said. Over her protest I took the gun, asked her to lock the door behind me and then I went out to make sure our would-be intruder was not returning now. Cautiously I walked around the building, which proved quite a task in the deep snow, hiked another quarter of a mile up the road along the dark rim of the forest, but I found no sign of a living thing in the dead stillness. When I came back Audrey was holding a stiletto in her hand. The long, slender steel with its mother-of-pearl handle gave the weapon a graceful, sinister beauty, more suggestive

of love and tragedy than the gun in my hand. Sharply I asked her to put it away. She returned it to its sheath and its keeping place on the mantel over the fireplace while making the cryptic remark:

"I ain't afraid of nobody, Donn—unless it's you!"

It required much pleading and coaxing to bring back a smile to Audrey's face. When it finally came with all the exquisite softness only a woman can emanate, it even followed her into sleep because late next morning when I woke up I found that same contented smile still playing around lips I had kissed good night only a few hours ago. I was also sure that it was more wistful and natural.

We were nearer as lovers when a goodbye after this last meeting echoed back to me and to her from the high hill across Birch Creek. Still a calm, sober voice seemed to warn me that the girl from whom I had just parted should from now on be a memory only. Somehow I felt better and stronger for thinking thus. No regrets, no remorse were harbored for having taken so much from her of a love so sublimely perfect in a physical sense. I had also given just as much, had given my all, and we had both been fair and just in this barter of love.

There was a light snow flurry the same morning I went to work on Gold Creek. Someone remarked: "That's the end of winter," and he must have known because that same night a warm wind

howled and whined as it swept down the valley. Rain followed, and during the next few days I saw a change so sudden that it seemed as if winter had disappeared almost overnight. The sun works fast and well when it returns for its short visit to the Northlands. I believe that nowhere can the change from winter into spring be more spectacular and charming.

25

ONE EVENING I found a sealed envelope on my bed. The handwriting was not familiar, still I knew that only one could write like that; only one would care to seek and to find a way of reaching me in this manner. But how had she managed to get it delivered? At first, curiosity about that part even exceeded my desire to learn about its contents, and I took time to question Ed before reading the note. His reply was a blank stare. The note was from Audrey. It really did not seem to matter what the note contained, because it would have had the same significant meaning if not read. It was so general and broad and vague in all but the caress of its endearing phrases of affection and in its reiterated pleadings for another meeting, for another chance. I was in no mood to consent, unless—well, she knew my terms. I read and read again while tenderness and longing swelled my heart in response to her simple and unmistakably sincere message of love. Still I found nothing of what I demanded before I could accept this af-

fair for more than just a passing infatuation, to be carried only this far. By letting the matter rest for a few days I felt sure that I could read it again with a calmer mind and perhaps only experience a kind, friendly feeling for the fair writer. I did not answer her note, did not care to do it. Another evening came, and there was another colored and perfumed envelope resting on my pillow. Only slowly, unwillingly, did a suddenly released torrent of aroused feelings listen and submit to reason. There was no promise in the letter, no offer to sacrifice for the sake of our love, but how eloquently she could plead and beg for me. I could hear her, I could see her as vivid memories raced through my mind. Agonized by conflicting doubts and hopes, all my efforts to sever her from my mind were in vain. Then a third note—and I wrote her for the first time. I was cruel in my frankness, sparing neither myself nor her as I bared my heart and mind in an open confession. I told her how wretched I felt every time I thought of her plying life's most detestable trade; told how I then even cursed the day I met her, how I hated myself for my weakness, for my pathetic inability to tear out of my heart every trace of one who had taught me to sin against my best dreams. I also wrote about my yearnings and the dreams and hopes she had inspired, told her of everything I thought could sweep away and kill any false hopes she might still be entertaining. Somehow I felt relieved when I

handed the letter to a boy who had promised to deliver it.

The following morning I received another note —she must have had an efficient messenger. It contained a brief but direct and passionately intimate reply and ended by requesting me to meet her on the following Sunday evening immediately after work. She would be waiting at the same place on the road above the sawmill where we had met before.

Another day of hard labor passed slowly. I did not sleep well during the long night that followed, and Ed grumbled about how restless I had been. Then came the day of our tryst. We were still working on a bedrock drain, now finishing the lower end of the deep ditch. It required a great deal of blasting and as many as fifty or more charges were set off at one time. This was always done in a mad rush and without using any electric device. There was no check on how many had failed to discharge until we came along with picks and shovels, and we never failed to find some. Near noon a young boy working only a few feet from me hit an unexploded charge with his pick. A violent eruption of dirt and rocks struck him in the face with terrific force, and he fell, moaning in terror and pain, his hands tearing madly at the dirt plastered over his face—another sacrifice to speed and greed! They said he might lose his eyesight. Unnerved and impatient, I thought the day

was never going to end. But time as man lives it is indeed finite, and when the sawmill whistle finally blew I did not wait for Ed, and I was the first one of the whole crew to reach camp.

My partner had not yet returned when I started out, almost eager enough to run a race in spite of my weary legs. I passed the sawmill, which by this time was something of a landmark to me, then walked another half a mile up the road to a point where it curved sharply. From there I had a splendid view of the creek valley and could at the same time watch a considerable stretch of the road. Audrey was not in sight, and I spent a long hour of contemplation and growing nervous tension. Without thinking of it, a melody reflecting my impatience came to me: "*La donna e mobile....*" I was still humming it when Audrey came.

It was a panting, tired girl I caught and held in my arms. She had run nearly all the way, she said, and her excuse for being so late was quite plausible. Without any make-up and wearing a simple but becoming calico dress, I felt with a thrill that this was the real and true self of Audrey. To me she could have been dressed in a brocaded gown, richly, gorgeously arrayed, and still not have looked any lovelier. Her proud, unaffected serenity was that of the woman I had always hoped was slumbering within her. The false notes, the cheap tinsel and gaudy colors of frivolity were gone, and it

seemed to me that a magic wand must have touched and changed my scarlet girl.

Down tumbled my walls and towers of resolution—but how could the woman now entering my conquered heart be an enemy? Our eyes met, and they stared frankly into souls stripped naked by life's most significant desire. Something indefinable had suddenly spanned the space of alienage between us, and now we knew each other. I felt that our love had in it some of the infinite age of the mating instinct itself. Her eyes shone as if reflecting a fire smoldering in their depths, and I saw a blue vein on her throat throb in its setting of exquisitely white skin. When her head fell backward and rested in limp abandonment on my arm I could not resist pressing my mouth against her slender neck, against that short channel of surging blood. It was a strange, sensual delight to feel the fast, regular heartbeats with my lips.

Audrey, Audrey—you enticing little devil, you comely image of an angel, how could anyone help loving you? What could any man desire more than to have and to hold this irresistible woman now trembling in my embrace as if frightened? Everything conscious within me had only one answer, and I knew that her lips could never form a "no" even if I asked for all she could give.

While facing a sun which looked like a large, red disc through the light evening mist and just now was sinking below the horizon at the narrow head

of Pine Creek, we walked back to Vista House, slowly, leisurely, as if time and distance did not matter. The same placid, contented feeling of relaxation I had experienced so often before in her presence now returned, and my agitation was drowned in a surging tide of tenderness. We had very little to say to each other during our walk to her home. Perhaps we both felt the undercurrent of suspense and therefore wanted to hide our apprehension and fear of the expected ordeal. Just as we walked up in front of the dark house she pressed my hand in a silent response to an endearing phrase. She looked up at me, and it seemed so natural that not even the faintest trace of a smile played around her lips. We had never looked at each other that way before, and I had never known her eyes to glow and glisten like this.

A rapturous feeling of self-abandonment rushed through me, and I felt tears come as I watched her light a lamp and then saw familiar shadows grow into fantastic shapes on log walls I always liked to associate with the warmth and comfort of a home of my own.

"Audrey, dear, why do you tremble so?" I asked as she came into my arms. "Can it be for the same reason that I do?"

My questions were answered, I felt sure, in the eloquent silence of a kiss and an embrace. I doubt that I have ever meant anything so honestly in my

life as when I broke the long, deep stillness and whispered into her ear:

"I love you Audrey, love you!"

These were the simple words of the lyric of my heart, but words expressing so well an emotion and a desire nearest of all to the most infinitely perfect that man and woman can ever hope to know and to possess in life. After she had told me of her love then it seemed to me that the only remaining barrier between us had at last been removed.

Gently I locked my fingers at the nape of her neck under a heavy tress of soft, black hair, and, clinging together, we looked at each other with unguarded eyes, speechless, yet revealing our innermost selves as words never could have done.

Not even in my wildest flights of fancy had I ever known how completely a woman can give herself to the one man she really loves. I was bewildered, nay, frightened by the savage tempest of a passion so sovereign in its primeval power, but suddenly—as is the way of nature—the crest of its mighty wave broke into the gentlest of calm.

And never shall I forget the dull glow of contented love I saw in her moist eyes just before they closed in deep slumber. I lay long into the night, listening and thinking. My arm across her chest rose and fell with the gentle rhythm of sleep, and I fancied that I was feeling something akin to the fullness of contentment which a baby must know

when it digs its love-hungry fingers deep into the warmth and softness of a woman's breast.

And I thought of how love meets us even far off the beaten paths of life and when least expected. Now it had chanced to cross my trail and had paused for a meeting. It seemed so nearly perfect that I wondered why doubts and suspicions about our love had not been swept aside long ago. What had been the cause of shame and many acts of deception in the past was now something I could have shouted to the world in open defiance of its moral prejudices. I had helped to lift this girl out of the depths, and she had given me a supreme realization of love and romance. No matter what might happen I intended to keep her, to live for her. *De profundis*—truly only the strong and the worthy can rise, can wing upward, and only those who are intelligent, capable of emotional fullness, and enriched with knowledge can attain real depth or height. The strings of her soul were too tautly drawn, like mine, but the discovery of that only made me more conscious of its hidden possibilities.

The practical aspects of our love were all contained in Audrey's promise to reform. She was to run the Vista House until next fall as a roadhouse. Her lease did not expire until then, and the fact that she intended to continue selling liquor did not cause any scruples of conscience or presentiment of troubles—I trusted her implicitly. I was so elated that I felt foolish when she told me that since our

last meeting several weeks ago she had never sold herself, had belonged only to me. The tenderness in her eyes and the proud ring in her voice proved that she did not lie. I soon learned that she was very truthful and I loved and respected her more for that even if her brutal candor often shocked me. She believed in facing most of life's problems squarely.

Early next morning I took leave and arrived at Gold Creek just in time to answer a few pertinent questions before going to work. Ed wore a peculiar look on his face all day after being told where I had spent the night, but to my surprise he had no caustic remarks to make. Undoubtedly he felt the need of preparing himself, because after supper I certainly received them in full measure from this master of innuendos.

ONE BRIGHT day it happened that one of Alaska's best-known sourdoughs dropped in to call on his friend Mr. Hill. The purpose of his visit was soliciting funds or, as a last resort, a temporary job. When he came into our bunkhouse we struck up an acquaintance. I had known him only a few minutes when he made me think of a gust of wind from the mountains, just as refreshing and vivacious. This restless roamer of gold-field trails could claim a proud name, but all that anyone cared to remember or use was the title which was his by right of birth. Judging him by looks, and everything else, for that matter, one would never associate the baron with aristocracy. The homeliness itself might not have signified so much, because "blue" blood certainly never meant any inherited right to beauty; but tramp, sailor, miner, and almost everything typical in plebeian vocations were written plainer all over him than on any man I had ever met. A pockmarked face seemed quite as it should be, and even the crooked pug nose was in

perfect harmony with other facial characteristics. His complexion ranged from a pure purple to the vivid blue-and-red sailors are known to acquire both on land and sea. Long arms from broad shoulders and muscular strength obvious in every line and bulge of his body completed nature's successful attempt to mould a cave man out of an Old World aristocrat. Still he would not have scared the most timid child, because there was always an effortless smile around his mouth and the genuine kindness of a simple, harmless soul shone with wonderful warmth from his pale-blue, indolent eyes. His swaggering self-confidence, so evident in speech and actions, made him an unforgettable specimen of a type not rare along frontiers of civilization.

The broad outlines of his story were just what any observer with imagination could have surmised from exterior indications. He had run away from home, of course, and I am quite sure it must have been a relief to his aristocratic family. Attempts to educate him had been fruitless, and a year or two in an exclusive private school seemed merely to have served the purpose of furnishing a rich source of comedy. How happily and fascinatingly ignorant he was in scholarly matters! His mind was as free as that of a child from the enigmas of culture, and he also had a child's capacity for happiness. Sometimes I felt that he had always known a philosophical goal quite similar

to the one I was trying to reach on the meandering roads of knowledge and experience. I liked him the very moment we met. My mind could rest while in his company, and he had a way of giving me some of the profound simplicity and practical clearness of his own mind. I envied him his priceless treasure of tranquillity, the possession of which I shall never fully know. His lack of sincerity, at least of the more solemn kind, coupled with unrestrained imagination, made him a most fascinating liar—he certainly could tell tales. His good-natured and loyal comradeship was appreciated, but we loved him above all as a story-teller. In that ancient art he was truly an artist, and for that alone we forgave this undignified peer for drinking, loafing, and lying.

The baron came to Alaska in '99 when still of the tender age we associate with elementary schools. Shore leave in San Francisco without returning to the ship of whose crew he was a member, was his informal and illegal manner of becoming an alien resident in the country of the free and the brave. He continued his itinerant life—it could not have been otherwise, because fate had cut him out for a puppet in a show of vagabondage and adventure. "Riding the rods" with the persistence and astonishing ability that only one born to the lure of vagabond ways can display, was something to which he repeatedly pointed with pride. His experiences were full of hollow and pathetic gestures

to cover the tragic farce his life was, still in such accomplishments were his only claims to superiority and such was his natural sphere of activity.

"If you ride long enough on rods you get to look just like the underneath of a boxcar. There's where I got my dusty complexion, and no soap can take that off my 'map.' "

His face furnished indisputable evidence that grey was distributed like a coat of dust over all other colors, but I doubt that his conclusion was correct. The baron was always interesting, and his wealth of stories seemingly inexhaustible. Simplicity of mind, coupled with such irresistible personal charms when sober, made him an enigma I could never solve.

With our new friend whose actual and imaginary adventures kept us entertained and, I might add, excited, there was no more drabness nor monotony in our cabin. Soon we became great friends. Each of us, including Ed, possessed many inherent and acquired characteristics of mind and body which we believed could be profitably shared in a partnership. We discussed the matter frequently, and only a few days after meeting the baron we decided to try our luck together.

Our employer did not care to grubstake the baron but gave him a job with enough latitude to permit his old acquaintance considerable freedom. The new employee was treated with an amused attitude of respect even by the foremen, and we all

had a smile to exchange with the ever-cheerful sourdough. The baron frankly admitted that he did not like to work, at least not in this manner. Being on a drunk for over a week and finding himself broke and unable to obtain credit, he realized, however, the necessity to face what was in his estimation the last resort of a self-respecting prospector.

One night our journey of fancy with the baron took us to Koyukuk. Few names have more of remote distance, more of the romance of interior Alaska and of placer mining than that outpost in the arctic west which looks like something daring and adventurous even on the map. I shall never forget how vividly the baron could describe its enticing opportunities and its exacting demands on those who dared to try. He claimed that years ago he had found a mine in Koyukuk which promised sure wealth, despite the handicap of an extremely short mining season and difficulties of transportation. This mine he generously offered to share with us on equal terms. We decided to leave Atlin in time to reach Whitehorse for an early start down the Yukon River. That meant only another week before hitting a trail which eventually might take us so far that at least a year would be required for the long journey. Forgetful of tomorrow's early hour of rising we worked on our itinerary until after midnight. Then a watchman came and ordered us to bed.

It was hard to fit Audrey into our unexpected and, even for Alaska, rather adventurous undertaking. Would the long trail bring us nearer our goal, nearer to each other? Were we equal to this test of separation without sacrificing a happiness of far greater importance than gold? Questions like these haunted me after retiring. I had slept only a few minutes when I woke with a wildly racing heart. My forehead was clammy with perspiration, and all my confidence and ambition had vanished after the agony of a nightmare centred around Audrey and my trip. In it I had descended into an abyss of self-accusing despair, and it left me feeling utterly helpless and dejected. And while tossing about restlessly until dawn at last had painted with red and violet the high, fleecy clouds visible through the small window above my bed, I had time to think of much. I was not alone any more and I began to realize the responsibility love also imposes.

Audrey trusted me implicitly; that I knew, and I was not going to desert her for a pot of gold at the rainbow's end. For the reason of her trust, however, I felt that we should face a sacrifice of the present so that we might see our best dreams come true in a future not too far away. Every opportunity is a challenge and a test. To my surprise the remote lure of Koyukuk thus proved stronger than my impetuous heart. I broke the

news gently but firmly in a letter. A week later we quit our jobs and returned to Birch Creek where we intended to spend a few days outfitting for the trip.

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AUDREY took it more philosophically than I had expected; in fact she was soon as badly smitten by enthusiasm for the trip as I was. She made me promise, however, that I would wait for her in Dawson. That was quite acceptable because we had planned on working there until next fall. With her arms around me or shoulder to shoulder we spent many hours planning and plotting, trying to tie together our fates as we jotted down notes and figures which I had never imagined could be so full of meaning and so expressive of our mutual hopes.

Early in the afternoon of our last day before leaving I bid goodbye to Maclaren and Sinclair. They had decided to stay for the season but intended to join us in Dawson if we reported favorably on conditions there. For my partners I had a brief but sufficient:

"See you at the Vista House early in the morning."

When I reached the rim of Birch Creek, the

valley I had learned to love as a friendly thing of home and friends, I stopped and looked back at the little cabin, then turned and saw another house also very close to my heart. I realized that there was now another burden, although one of another kind, added to what I carried on my back.

Looking like a trim little Dutch maiden in her calico dress and starched apron, Audrey came running to meet me. This was unexpected, for I was early. There was a brave but forced smile on her lips, and we intentionally let cautious words play their part of ameliorating the tension of our feelings.

An ill-chosen expression of amazement escaped me when we entered the house:

"Well, I'll be damned! Oh, pardon me, but what have you been doing, Audrey? Say, this surely must be a king you are expecting—not humble me!"

Two large candlesticks towered amidst vases filled with wild flowers on a table set for a feast. Everything was arranged with exquisite taste and with that delicate touch of simple formality which always lends dignity and charm to a meal. With its tall, slender neck and glittering tinfoil a bottle of Rhine wine graced my place at the table. And there was also a profusion of flowers in the room.

When it was time to dine I, in overalls and khaki shirt, stood behind my hostess' chair, bowing and offering it with the formal courtesy of an Old

World gentleman. But working clothes and calico were not even noticed during the truly epicurean meal that followed. When at last I raised my glass, which had wine alive with rising pearls of reflected light from the candles, I could not for the life of me find the words I wanted for a toast, and only an unconventional *skaal* ended our dinner.

Reversing the usual procedure, Audrey insisted on retiring to change dress. Meantime I went out for a last stroll around the Vista House. Upon my return I found Audrey reclining in a corner of the wide, built-in window seat, a place of rest and retreat which was the only softening contrast in a room otherwise so austere with its high ceiling and dark log walls. Every little detail of construction throughout this impressive house was a mute but eloquent evidence that the builder had been a lover of the forest, and he had, indeed, succeeded in bringing much of its spell and lure into his home.

The serene monotony, however, was too predominant, and I used to think that if gloom ever entered this abode it would come to stay. But there was one place it would not care to linger long. No wonder Audrey liked it. The casement window, looking like a portal around and above her retreat, was in Gothic cathedral style and a broad, hand-carved panel in some light wood, probably birch, formed its wide arch. The whole window arrangement did not harmonize with the rustic interior,

but that did not detract any from the thing of beauty it possessed in its own rights.

Fascinated, startled, I stopped on the threshold when I saw Audrey as I had never seen her before. Evidently she had not heard me enter. It looked as though she had every pillow in the house piled around herself and in the other corner where I knew I was expected to sit. Her head was tilted back against the window frame, revealing her slender neck and a profile, sharp and distinct as a silhouette. Her hands, with all fingers locked together, were resting on the drawn-up knees, and there was in every line something suggestive of complete abandon in repose and contentment. Motionless and wide-eyed, she was looking out into the beginning of another eventide, and with rays from a setting sun still flooding her, she looked like a statue, like an artist's creation in marble—black and red and white as the living model. There was, so I reflected, some of the same exaggerated enhancement in this picture of her as one often views in sunsets. It actually seemed unreal because of its excess of splendor. I could not help but fancy that no painter's palette had ever held the right colors for a canvas with all the exquisite loveliness and unaffected grace now revealed before my hungry eyes. Audrey was wearing a tight-fitting evening gown of red velvet, fiery, suggestive, and intriguing as only that color can be, and above the proud sweep of her brow ran a yellow ribbon of glossy

silk, looking like a golden diadem across the gipsy hair. The red beads of her necklace resembled drops of blood. A tiny diamond on a ring sparkled, and the large stones in her gaudy earrings held and reflected light and colors with a soft, dull glow—I was sure that more discerning eyes than mine would have failed to find any flaw in this picture.

Moments grew into longer units of time; still I lingered in the doorway loath to break this spell of enchantment. She had already called my name several times, each time a little louder, and when I noticed that she was growing restless or concerned I walked up to destroy this fascinating *tableau vivant*, crushing it in an embrace. Tarnished gold and glistening silver still streamed through the window, but little by little the colors faded into the sombre grey of twilight. The room grew darker. Then a full moon crawled over the low mountain range in the east, and the reflection of its pale light on the still snow-covered hillsides made us forget how late it was. Silent, intent, we sat and looked at each other as only lovers can, conscious only of a tender rapture of happiness. To us, morning and parting were ages away, still remote and unreal, and we were all alone in the whole, wide world—nothing but our love mattered, nothing else until the final goodbye had been said. Tears glistened and gave lustre and sadness to her deep eyes, but a soft, contented smile never left the slightly parted lips. A light color of pink tinted the ivory-white

of her cheeks. She reached over and seized my hands in a tight, possessive grip. Her voice was low, but it had a tone of almost savage earnestness when she asked:

"Donn, do you really, truly love me, do you? Would you do anything, would you go to hell for me if needed—honest and cross your heart?"

I laughed. It took a long time before her peculiar but fascinatingly simple vernacular lost its comical ring even during serious conversations.

"Why mention that unpleasant place, dear?" I asked lightly. "To go there surely wouldn't do us any good, and I don't believe it will ever happen—at least not to you. Oh, I know what you mean, Audrey. I do love you, dearest, sweetest, little girl, love you well enough to go to—well, any place!"

When in a serious mood—and that was the color of her personality—Audrey always spoke very slowly, almost cautiously, as if reluctant to leave every word, every syllable until the utmost fullness of what she felt and meant had been imparted strongly and conclusively. To me there was music in her emphatic emotional intonation, and even hard and vulgar words could sound quite acceptable when they came in the disguise of gentleness and almost naïve simplicity over her lips. Tonight the melodious timbre of her voice seemed to express her feelings as it never had before—at times I suspected her of acting—she was as accomplished in elocution as a trained artist.

There were many restless thoughts urging to be voiced, but somehow we were both hesitant. Looking at me as if she could read what I wanted to tell her, she said:

"Go ahead and spill it. I want what you want, too—and I promise to do it."

"You should know without my telling you. Three months from now we'll meet in Dawson. Let me hold your hands—looks silly, doesn't it? We should care! Meanwhile, dear, you mustn't disappoint me, and I promise to be true to you. That covers everything that matters, so we're not going to worry. Our love isn't worth a tinker's damn if it can't stand this test. And it wouldn't be right for us to get married until I can provide a home and all that goes with it. Oh, hell, why don't you tell me to shut up. What good does it do to preach and promise—we don't need to—we love each other, and that's enough."

"I'd kill you, Donn," she cried, "I sure would if you'd ever shake me for some other jane!"

I forced my face to harden into a scowl.

"And I would do worse than that," I retorted, "if you failed me—you know what I mean. I wouldn't kill you, that would be too easy, but I think I would turn cave man and beat you up."

Smiling I went on:

"By the way, dear, you remind me of deep water, so now I know what made me plunge and so deep

too that I'm not so sure that I'll ever get up to the surface again."

"You like to say pretty things, don't you, Donn," was her kind comment and then we both laughed, the little ripple calm.

"Tell me a story, fair Scheherezade," I pleaded, "tell me something about yourself—or will you sing for me?"

"No, Donn," she refused, smiling into my eyes. "And, please, don't insist—it may break the spell, and I wouldn't risk that for anything. But would you like to have me dance for you? Mother once taught me an old folk dance. They say it's good—watch me!"

Curiosity enhanced my interest because I had never seen her dance. I nodded my approval, feeling, however, somewhat skeptical, for I considered myself quite a connoisseur, especially of the more classic features of the terpsichorean art. My father had seen to this part of my education from the time I was old enough to attend and appreciate opera.

After carefully arranging a long silk shawl and loosening her hair, she took a few slow, lazy steps with all the indolent grace and charm of a true signorina, flaunting her head and swinging her lithe, slender body in a rhythmic interpretation of the soft melody she hummed. Then there came more throbbing life and more abandon in the cadence, and her long skirts swirled faster, lifting and lower-

ing the laced hems, hiding and revealing the loveliest of limbs. Every muscle was in play, instantly responsive to the esthetic sensitiveness of a born dancer. I had never seen Audrey as graceful and enchanting as this. She must have intentionally reserved this dance as a surprise for our last night together. A surging tide of rapture carried me to a faraway Latin country, and I felt its very soul of passion and exotic charm. I missed only the accompaniment of a guitar or the staccato clicking of castanets. The sensuous and suggestive softness in her luminous eyes mirrored the same ecstasy of love which was sweeping over me with irresistible strength.

When at last she came very close to the window seat and stood before me first with drooping head and motionless body and then swaying slightly as if very tired, I caught her limp hands and pulled her down beside me. Somehow she seemed to have changed, and I fancied that an exquisitely lovely mirage had been transformed into something much more real and desirable. I felt confused and bashful, felt very much like a clumsy northern peasant wooing a proud and comely daughter of the South.

Time was indeed niggard that last night in Atlin, more swift than ever before, but the celerity of its flight was the only fault, the only discord in the composition of one tender stanza in the tenderest lyric of my youth. Tired eyes finally closed in sleep. But light of early morning had already

tinted a heavy cloud bank above the moonlit mountain tops with a dull red and yellow before I felt the strong grip of a little hand slowly release its hold. Then I rose on my elbow, bent down over her, and kissed away two glistening teardrops which still remained in the shadowy corners of her eyes. I did not sleep for hours. There was so much to make me wonder, think, and hope, and also a thousand and one problems of heart and mind clamoring to be solved. How could there be—so I pondered—anything wrong or evil in the unrestrained freedom and abandon of our unconventional love when it had caused such deep contentment to emanate even in sleep from a face which a short time ago had looked so listless and bored. Now I was willing to defy anyone with all the arrogance of one in love and claim that we took and gave only what rightfully belonged to us.

It seemed that I had slept but a few minutes when the noisy arrival of Ed and the baron woke us with a start. Audrey suggested refreshments for them, but I objected, fearing a postponement of the inevitable climax. I wanted to have it over with—the tension was like a crushing, choking strait jacket. And when it now came with feelings so void of restraint, frenzied and ruthless, I afterward thought of it as something which could not possibly have happened. And the fact that I refused to give up my trip despite her hysterical but touching appeal was also something I could not

understand—it was not like me to resist in this manner.

When at last I reached behind my neck and took her hands by the wrists as firmly and gently as I could to break the rigid clasp, it could not have been an actress who slowly sank before me until on her knees. But how quickly, how bravely she pulled herself together. There was only a faint tremor in her voice as she whispered her goodbye. And when she said something so unexpected and different as:

"Be sure to change socks and underwear often," it felt as if an unendurably taut string had finally snapped. Relieved, we both laughed when an expression of mirth was least expected. Still we lingered. Her nervous fingers stroked and caressed—then at last a parting kiss—then a piercing scream and a low, sobbing moan. For a timeless moment I looked and saw the remote gaze in her eyes and I thought that something must have suddenly brought out the full depth and dignity of her soul.

EVEN the hearts of hard men must grow gentle around campfires. Rich, indeed, are those who can enjoy the soothing fatigue which steals over a tired wanderer while he sleepily watches the flames change to glowing embers and then die, slowly die. I know of no lullaby sweeter than the crackling of a campfire and I have always felt that at no time, except in prayer, is man closer to himself and to his God than after the fullness of a full day on the trails of nature's most enchanting frontier land.

My friends at first were leaving me very much to myself, and I appreciated their attitude as one of respect and understanding. They did not judge the girl of my choice with the intolerance of conventional society; they only questioned the possibility of reform, but that was to be expected and I did not care. The baron paid me a compliment by saying that I was showing signs of quick recovery from my erotic intoxication—or words to that effect. The trail called for close attention to more practical matters and left me little time for reveries.

Our packs were not even nearly equal in weight and size. I was the owner of a very large wool blanket, treasured by us all, but it was just that many pounds too much for me to carry. This essential part of a bed, I argued, which was to be shared by us all should be carried by the one with the lightest load. Finally I won my case by threatening to sell the blanket at the very first opportunity, and then the baron accepted it for his broad and strong but unwilling shoulders.

As I was leaving, Audrey had handed me a wax-sealed envelope with instructions not to open it until after we had made camp the first evening. She had told me that it contained only a letter, but its thickness indicated other contents. I intended to open it after supper, but when that time came I had no chance to read it. The baron remained up, but Ed and I retired early. Our tireless entertainer had not yet finished his long story when his head drooped and his words vanished in incoherent murmur. He went to sleep sitting by the fire, and it took less than a flight of fancy to imagine that he was an Indian sentinel, an aborigine of the North, with his proud head now bent low, not asleep but brooding and planning in the grave, watchful, and silent manner characteristic of those near the Great Spirit, near the soul of nature. The shifting rays from the fire played around his blanket-covered shape. Long shadows moved among the trees. A wolf howled and

whined, and before the echo of this plaintive warning had gone and again returned, the baron rose, put more wood on the fire, and quickly sought his place in the joint bed.

Early the following morning I read Audrey's long letter. The thrall of love was in every line, in every endearing phrase, and I felt strangely aware of her nearness after I had finished reading something which was truly a bit of her own soul. It also contained three one-hundred-dollar bills, which I carefully secreted inside the lining of my coat. I understood her motive but even our lack of funds could not have changed my determination to return the money.

The more I thought of the money the less I appreciated her generosity. The resentment I first felt was unreasonable, but I looked upon this money as the very thing which had robbed and tainted Audrey and silently I heaped every invective I could think of upon man's greed and lust and injustice. Thank God that I had come into her life before it was too late. No, I could never use this money! It was too much a part of the loveliness and youth and soul of the one I loved—it was hers with the most unquestionable right in the world—she had given her all for it, and it should belong to no one else.

"What's ailing you, Donn? Snap out of it. Audrey ain't the only girl with a pretty face, and

I think you' better consider your folks a bit before you tie up with one like her—cut it out!"

Ed meant well, and his voice was kinder than his words.

"Thanks Ed, I'll be all right soon."

Incidentally, the fact that I now had more money in my possession than I had had for several years was, of course, not obliterated by my violent reaction against its origin. I hardly dared to consider what we could accomplish with it. We had left Atlin with sufficient funds to finance only the first lap of the long journey. Guns, dogs, tools, grub, and countless other items necessary for a complete outfit, remained as hopeful dreams in the laps of the Gods. Traveling as we did, it would take at least three hundred dollars to finance our Koyukuk expedition. In terms of work that would mean a great deal of hard labor; in fact more of it than I cared to contemplate.

During the week that followed I learned to know what it is to be tempted. I did not dare to confide in my friends for fear of expected consequences. The thought of the money was like a discordant note in a symphony, and it spoiled much of an otherwise pleasant trip. Late one evening while following the railroad track between Carcross and Whitehorse we saw the famed Miles Canyon. Here the upper Yukon River is at its best and wildest. The baron told of the time he "shot" the rapids first here and then through the even

more furious torrent of the Whitehorse Rapids. Watching it seeth and froth, looking like sure death, I could not help but pause and reflect over the courage and folly of man when he dared, conquered, or failed for the sake of gold during the Klondike rush.

In Whitehorse Ed worked for a few days in a copper mine, but my own and the feeble efforts of the baron to find work were unsuccessful. After buying a rowboat we had just enough money left for food to last three or four weeks, provided that fish and meat could be obtained with the less costly means of gun and rod. Before leaving on the six-hundred-mile journey from Whitehorse to Dawson, I returned the money Audrey had sent me. Without regrets I parted with something which might mean so much to our venture. Under the circumstances, however, it seemed to me the most decent thing to do. My letter to her had this long postscript:

"I like to think that you know, even without any explanation, why I am returning the three one-hundred-dollar bills you gave me. You will notice a few more creases and spots, and you may draw your own conclusions. Returning the money is more than a mere gesture, dear; in fact, it is just what your sentimental and foolish lover would do. Please try to believe that my gratitude is deeply and sincerely felt. It surely was nice of you to send it. May I hope that you look at my refusal in

the same light? Now I am broke, but you need your money worse than I do. If I had had any to spare—or any at all for that matter—it would be my duty to send you every penny. The other day something occurred which made me want your money very badly. Try to believe, little sweetheart, that my heart belongs to you with even greater fidelity than it does to a few ideals which keep me from slipping to the bottom of the hill. Foolish of me, perhaps, but I think that this money is too much a part of yourself, and I cannot, I dare not, accept anything which might endanger our love.”

THERE was an unforgettable thrill of anticipation in starting out on the long trip down the mighty Yukon River. When we shouted an unsolicited farewell to some squat Indians camping near the dock, it seemed to me that their immobile faces registered just a trace of the contempt which the red man harbors toward us white intruders. High banks hemmed in the swift river, and every line and contour had that soft, curved grace only a river can give to scenery. The spare growth of low and spear-tipped spruce trees enhanced the pastoral beauty of the rich, grassy slopes, and wild flowers had already added many exquisite colors to the incomparable charm of this ever changing, never tiring panorama.

We agreed upon taking turns at four-hour shifts. Praise and criticism of the navigator were liberally given. Rowing was seldom attempted unless necessary to speed up when traveling over stretches of sluggish water. Steering the small craft proved quite a task, although always too interesting to become tiresome.

The summer nights on the Yukon River were to me an inexhaustible source of wonder and interest, always new, always looked forward to every day as the promise of another plunge into the wildest and fairest of dreams. A solemn quietness with soft and long shadows rather than darkness or even twilight lulls the Northland to sleep. Something blurred, illusive, and indefinable falls like a pall over the land. Still the grim sternness which is Alaska's truest aspect is only mellowed by the short summers; it is always there and with it the melancholy and serenity which creeps into one's heart and makes one understand the profound sadness, fear, and fatalism so characteristic of aborigines. Only after hearing Indians and Eskimos play and chant at their tribal festivals, did I realize that nature's own repose, tranquillity, loneliness, and even some of the eerie, deathlike spirit which fills one's soul with awe, can be put into words and music.

The incessant hum of mosquitoes, the occasional hooting of an owl, the whispering ripples of restless water—all were part of the nocturnal silence and seemed only to emphasize its sublime depth with an aura of spiritual significance. I was always conscious of being so fully alive, so alert, and so strangely attuned to the ever-changing moods of nature when I steered our little craft down the river after twilight had reluctantly changed into night. It was never very dark even during cloudy

and rainy nights. There was only a little more of a soft, mystic blur over the background.

We went ashore several times every day to prepare and eat our meals and occasionally to take short hunting trips. Rabbits were plentiful, and we also succeeded in killing a few ducks. Ed had managed to procure several sticks of dynamite, and while it lasted we did not have to employ any of the slower and more ethic methods of catching fish. Only half a stick of the explosive dropped into some eddy invariably produced enough to last several days. The baron informed us that this mode of fishing was very much illegal, but even Canadian law is far from being omnipresent.

The big thrill of the trip was Five Finger Rapids. We knew that the most dangerous rocks had been removed, but the steadily increasing roar while approaching this famous place put more fear into us than the occasion should warrant. The huge rock in the center of the stream seemed to be placed in the very path of our boat but the plunging waters swung us away without even the need of steering. I am sure I have never held my breath as long as I did that time.

The baron told us a story which lasted all the way down to Dawson. It was of pioneer days, and now and then our friend pointed to the illustrations: Lake Le Barge, Eagle Nest Rock, Pelly River, White River, and many other names significant in the annals of Alaska and still interesting with the

romance of today. There were many log cabins along the river and from some of them we saw smoke rise, telling us that the upper Yukon had not yet been deserted by all miners and trappers. But fur and gold seldom last long, and it did not take the sourdoughs many years to empty the rich stores of this country. The greed of man is such that he wants much more than he needs and he also wants it in a hurry.

During my watch late one evening we passed around a large dome-shaped bluff. My partners were asleep, but when I exclaimed: "There's Dawson!" they scrambled to their feet almost too quickly for our extremely sensitive boat. We fired questions at the baron much faster than he could answer them. He pointed out places and buildings of interest, adding brief explanations in his own truly incomparable manner.

Somehow it was difficult for me to join my friends in their exultant happiness. Thoughts which came like uninvited guests for this occasion of joy carried me far away from Dawson to Audrey and home, and I felt depressed and very, very lonely.

When we at last tied our boat to the remnant of an old wharf near the mouth of Klondike River, the baron remarked in a disappointed voice that we had been exactly two weeks making the first six hundred miles along the water trail of Yukon River—evidently no record for speed.

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IN AN odd-shaped enclosure on a low platform close to the bar I noticed a striking "peroxide" blonde drinking alone at a small table. There was too much paint and powder to justify calling her beautiful, but she had fine features, a marvelous profile and a well-shaped body, erect and graceful. The imagination of a sculptor could not have created anything more strikingly depictive than she was of a pining, lovelorn woman. When I called my friends' attention to her, the baron exclaimed:

"Why that's Mac's wife. They used to call her 'the crying Dago' in the early days. She's no spring chicken any more."

After hearing more about her and the sordid romance she had once enacted and still reflected, she held my eyes with the fascination of one famous in her own rights as well as having been immortalized by a well-known poet.

The bartender must have overheard our conversation because he offered to introduce us. We declined but treated him and ourselves to another

round of drinks. Our depleted funds did not permit this spending, but the baron convinced us it was necessary in order to get acquainted. He now proceeded to take us around to get the lay of the land. He had surprisingly many friends, although I noticed that most of them were on the dispensing side of the bars. For the price of comparatively few drinks we finally gathered that there was work to be had, but one would have to know where to go to find the different mines. This we expected our aristocratic friend to do, but another day passed before he was persuaded to leave the saloons he liked so well, even if little remained of their old glamour and appeal.

Every individual, whether conscious of it or not, interprets history according to his conception of life. To me it can never mean anything but the emotional, romantic, and philosophical aspirations of man in groups or as individuals. Why did they struggle, why did they commit their acts of right and wrong, and what did they finally attain in art, letters, music, and general culture?

The baron was a historian to my liking. His was not merely a store of statistics and data; he gave us men and women as he had actually known them. They represented only an infinitesimal part of the crowd, remote and elusive, but they had hearts and souls which he could bring close and make them appear as real as ourselves. Somehow it made me feel that their apparent follies were only normal

reactions to hardships and privation; in fact, often nothing but what I might have done myself without many regrets. They were a bewildered lot, not only because of the gold, but also because this overwhelming country with its terrible hardness and magnificence was too much for them. The awesome sweep of sky and snow-capped mountains and all the unspoiled and forbidding primitiveness helped me to vision what a weird life it must have been when gold fever added its frenzy to the emotions of the seething mob which once crowded the muddy streets of Dawson. They did not come to live here; gold was their only aim, and they certainly meant to get it. And the country was cold and unfriendly and so were the gold seekers for reasons of self-preservation as well as greed and ambition.

My cherished blanket and Ed's 30-30 carbine were converted into cash for reasons more sufficient than food or drinks. "It certainly takes money to find a job in Alaska as well as a job to make money," observed one of my partners, and we found that the statement contained a great deal of truth. Alaska is no country for vagabonds, at least not of the professional type. The baron came as nearly being one as possible, but hard though infrequent labor played an important part even in his carefree life.

There were several letters for me at the post office. All was well at home. My parents expressed

their hope to see me soon, my father also emphasizing his belief that my present career was in an unsuitable field of activity. My disappointment in not hearing from Audrey was greater than I would admit even to myself. Should I try to locate her aunt? Dawson has an officially tolerated, if not sanctioned, red-light district and to find her ignominious relative would not be difficult. Undoubtedly Audrey would write me first, I argued, so I decided to wait, growing less resigned and less patient as another day or two slowly passed. When time came to leave for Hunter Creek where we had been promised a chance at a short job, I called once more for my mail at the general delivery window. There was a letter postmarked Atlin, and I could hear my heart pound as hammer blows while my trembling fingers tore it open.

Audrey had been sick. The words after that simple monosyllable, so pregnant with meaning, became blurred when a wave of apprehension swept over me. Everything unpleasant I could conjure up flashed into my mind, and it seemed that some imperceptible force deep within me tugged and tore at its conscious leash so that it could be unfettered and bridge the distance to a place where I feared a tragedy might have been enacted. She was better, although not yet fully recovered. "Who had taken care of her?" I wondered until I read the footnote which conveyed personal regards to me from Lady Brown. With a piercing pain of self-

reproach I regretted all my hard thoughts of the vixen-faced woman who had once been my partner in the black sand deal. This was another time when I realized the sublime profundity and tolerance in Christ's teachings. Two hard-judged women came closer to me, and I felt much better for it.

Stubbornly I refused to reveal anything to my inquisitive partners, despite the annoying fact that they both persisted in drawing wrong conclusions. Only once did I reply and then I shouted the words with vehemence:

"No, she has not and let that be enough to cover everything—yes, even jilting me. It's none of your damn business, anyhow!"

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LATE that same night after having called at several mines and dredges on our way up Klondike River we camped in the lee of a tailing-pile and under a wide-branched tree lifting its crown toward a friendly, star-spangled sky. When Ed and the baron were asleep I stole away to write a letter to Audrey. My diary again furnished the stationery. Several hours later I tore out a dozen or more pages with a feeling that my beloved book had also contributed some of its intimacy and frankness to the long letter. I felt calm and confident again—much of the agony of clashing emotions had, so to speak, been transferred to the paper in that subtle manner one can experience only in a confession.

Alaska is a land of odd moments, odd sights. Something new and different is always in the offing—to chill one, to thrill one. And this night was one of almost broad daylight, without shadows and mellowed by a strangely suffused glow. The slopes of the high mountains along the divide still basked in direct rays from the midnight sun. Patches and

fields of snow looked as if coated with silver. The sheen of copper and gold showed little spots of fairy treasure and made it easy to dream. It was a panorama of entralling loveliness such as leaves no one cold and tired. I felt lost in a trance, felt that I could follow my eyes to where they roamed in the silvery haze of sunlit space. Night was turned into day, and still all nature seemed to know it was time to rest. Sleep steals over one just as softly even without the pall of darkness.

Early the following day I returned alone to Dawson. My partners had succeeded in obtaining work, but a discerning foreman frankly pronounced me physically unfit. He gave me, however, a note to the superintendent of a large mining company, and this kindness softened much of the blow. Loneliness is with me seldom a matter of not having any companions, and I was neither lonely nor entirely disappointed while trudging along a road which seemed to have grown much longer overnight.

Few can have pondered more over the psychology of drinking than I have. Sensitive and high-strung minds, easily enraptured, easily depressed, crave stimulants more than others and for obvious reasons. The individual problems of drinking are in degree and nature correlated with individual reactions, both physical and mental. Alcohol always had the effect of whipping my thoughts and emotions into terrific action. Knowing this, I was

always on guard trying to avoid those abnormally violent plunges into the Nirvana of intoxication. Drinking also had an intellectual but still sinister appeal which grew stronger as I tasted more of unfettered imagination. The liberty and orgy of my vagarious dreams were often so savage and daring that it surprised and shocked my rather insensible companions. Most of us certainly pay dearly for every attempt to swing the pendulum of normalcy toward imaginary happiness or freedom from pain and worry with the aid of expedient but treacherous stimulants—every such visit to Olympus means a plunge down into the realms of Pluto.

Both Ed and the baron had a tremendous capacity for liquor. The effect on them was generally only exalted physical prowess or mental stupor, and there were no intellectual and few moral complications. It meant temporary happiness to our empty and hungry hearts, and for that we paid rather dearly at times but always willingly. Society and not individuals should be indicted for most evils of excessive drinking, and somehow I cannot find fault with the perspective I acquired after seeing so many naked truths pertinent to liquor. A drunkard invariably inspires only the gentlest and kindest thoughts in me. Who are we to judge? Surely the soul of every man and woman knows unendurable torment and tragedy as part of the inevitable scheme of living, and why begrudge them any form of relief or happiness no matter

how much they might pay for their escape from reality? Some people seem to be more easily shocked by the effects of drinking than by the original causes, an attitude which to my way of thinking is only the intolerant prejudice of ignorance and mediocrity.

A bartender in the Bonanza Saloon was the only man in Dawson with whom I was on intimate terms. He was a good listener and apparently not troubled with any mental complexes. He had taken a liking to me which I believed was not entirely professional, so I spent considerable time in his establishment. When I entered the saloon after my first unsuccessful attempt to find a boss, he hailed me rather noisily. His flushed face told the old story, and I secretly hoped that his "jag" was of a generous nature. It proved to be, indeed. Before the advent of another morning, I had met a large number of sourdoughs, had consumed an untold number of drinks, and I remember giving lectures on subjects ranging from philosophy to the best and safest way of beating a freight train—all and much more crowded into a grand and glorious night. I refused to accompany my host to Lousetown, and when I woke up late next day in his room with excruciating pains of body and mind, it really helped to remember that I had been capable of at least one decent act.

Fortunately my letter of introduction proved effective, and two days later I started down the

river to Fortymile where I was to report for work in a near-by mine. The rowboat had continued to be our camp in Dawson, for the sole reason that we could not sell it. Before leaving, I wrote my partners and gave them my new address, telling them also to depend upon me for financial assistance in case I succeeded in holding the promised job. Instead of trying to reach my destination as fast as oars and current would take me, I camped a whole day at the mouth of a small creek. It was a sheltered and picturesque place, and two well-built log cabins bore mute evidence of hard work and apparent failure. They had been constructed to last and to protect. The owner must have left several years ago, but there was no sign of vandalism. One learns to respect Alaskans for their hospitality and their sincere appreciation thereof. Several novels and a huge stack of old magazines furnished the relaxation I needed to escape my memories and alleviate my jangled nerves.

Audrey seemed very near. I had found a friendly haven of rest—also a place to dream the laziest and gentlest of dreams. And the thought came to me that, for all we know, one's best foundation in life might rest upon the feathery lightness of cirrous clouds of fancy and make-belief.

GATHERED along the edge of the high river bank below Hudson's Bay Company store in Forty-mile a large number of men was watching, with the usual unkind curiosity of a crowd, the awkward attempts of a young man to start an obstinate gasoline engine. Finding no other convenient place, I went ashore a few yards above his large and well-equipped craft and was then close enough to hear some very choice remarks in the king's best English. The audience was having a great deal of fun at the young man's expense, but I guess my sense of humor was not as highly developed. When I laughed it was because I had never before heard such a broad and deep-throated pronunciation of "bloody," "jolly," "bally," and other words popular in England. A tall man in the conspicuous uniform of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police now broke away from the crowd and approached me. Without even the formality of a greeting he fired a volley of questions at me, and after I had presented my credentials as a bona

fide miner he permitted a smile to mellow the facial sternness of the law he so fittingly represented.

Ed had imparted to me some of his own exaggerated respect for "redcoats." Much to his sorrow he had once cast his lot with a man very much wanted for the crime of using a railroad boss as target for his Colt revolver. Ed was innocent enough except for the fact that he had assisted his friend in the verbal part of the battle. Fortunately the bullets had missed the intended victim, but that did not stop the mounted police from giving the culprits a merry chase. Since that time the very sight of a red tunic gave Ed a scare, and no arguments to the contrary could convince him that they must have given up the search. Fortymile, which is an old Hudson's Bay Company trading post and replete with history, apparently had not experienced the violent upheavals of some of the richer mining camps. My informer and historian was a more notorious than famous sour-dough whom I met in the only remaining saloon in Fortymile. His claim to fame was to have been plied with liquor in the store of N. A. T. & T. Company—or was it saloon?—across the river one eventful day during the winter of 1897, thus treated for the purpose of selling him what was considered a worthless claim on a tributary to Klondike River. He bought it for the sum total of the contents of his poke, and the subsequent fact that this mine produced gold worth millions,

partly for him and mostly for others, was his story of life. He was now a professional guide, bear hunter and saloon habitué. While listening to him I wondered how many free drinks his story might have brought him. I know I shall always be able to remember his story of the deal in the now deserted store across Fortymile River where once again truth proved to be stranger than fiction.

My ultimate destination was Slate Creek, situated some four or five miles downstream from Fortymile. Due to my encounter with the old reprobate, I stayed overnight before leaving on the remaining lap of the trip. I invested my last dollar in flour and bacon, more as a matter of precaution than necessity. Bitterly I regretted my inexcusable generosity in the saloon and I really gasped for breath when it suddenly occurred to me that in case of failure to get the promised job there would inevitably be "hell to pay." No money, no gun, nor anything else of value which could be converted into food. Incidentally I dropped half a stick of dynamite into a likely looking fish hole near Slate Creek and the result of this unsportsmanlike act was a catch of trout and whitefish, so plentiful and so delicious that I felt there was no real reason to worry about surviving in this land of plenty.

Above the mouth of Slate Creek there is a large flat through which the Yukon River must have changed its course many times. A number of small

lakes, low sand ridges, and intersecting sloughs indicate old channels. It was evident even from a considerable distance that this section must be a hunter's paradise. Frequently I heard the call of ducks, geese, and other winged inhabitants of the North, and I began to realize to what extent a bountiful nature has softened the severity of Alaska. Life was pulsating everywhere. The thought came that Audrey and I might retreat to the tranquil existence of trapper and hunter, far removed from the rush and noise of industrial strife. The best of culture and intellectual life if not comfort could be ours even in a lowly log cabin on the Yukon, and we might learn to know peace and contentment and our own souls in exchange for the glitter and glamour of the "outside."

Slate Creek flows through a district containing immense deposits of low-grade bituminous coal. Only one mine was in operation at this time. The coal was used to produce electric power at a large plant near the mine. It belonged to a company operating dredges on Klondike River and its tributaries, and power was furnished from here when the hydroelectric plant near Dawson closed down after the freeze-up. Coal was also shipped on barges to Dawson and other river points.

I arrived at the dock while a trainload of coal was being dumped into large loading bins, hence just in time for a ride to the mine on a miniature

railroad in a country where this mode of transportation is not a common sight.

To work in or around a coal mine did not have any romantic appeal—not that it disappointed me, because I had already acquired a very pessimistic opinion of manual labor in general and mining in particular. Coal mining is a skilled trade, and I knew enough about it to realize that pretending was not going to help me any when I faced the ordeal of being questioned about ability and experience. As expected, the foreman proved to be very inquisitive, and his impassive eyes certainly did not register any satisfaction during the interview which followed immediately after I had arrived at the camp. Later, I learned that the job to which I was assigned was considered the official eliminator of undesirables sent on to the camp by the main office in Dawson. Evidently I was also slated for "good riddance," and it was really nothing short of a miracle that I survived.

My work consisted of taking care of the coal in the loading bunkers. During the long intervals between loading the small railroad cars, when the bunkers were partly or completely emptied, it was necessary to pile up the coal, which arrived from the mine with almost uninterrupted certainty, until I was nearly buried. Sweating, swearing, and feeling very much like "hell"—to say the least—I had to manage the best I knew how and without any assistance until again relieved by the train. No

matter what happened I was expected to handle the bunkers in such a manner that every "trip," as we called each string of cars from the mine, was not held up long enough to interfere with the work underground. One day when even thoughts of Audrey and other daydreams failed to compensate for aches and fatigue and general disgust, I was unexpectedly relieved. The mine superintendent, a tall, cultured son of Albion, looking more like a poet and dreamer than a miner, called me to his office and asked if I would prefer a light job in the mine with better pay to something more strenuous but safer around the plant. These alternatives were both acceptable, but the job I had managed to survive had given me a new perspective, and I would gladly have accepted anything that did not involve too much physical effort. I felt something closely related to fear of that dark, sinister-looking opening to a tunnel descending several hundred feet into the ground and I had learned to hate a maw disgorging so much agonizing work. Still the mine was my choice.

On the evening of the same day I was promoted, I received several letters. Ed wrote that he and the baron were going on a new stampede and not to expect them back until in the spring. It seemed that I just had to pause and reflect a few moments before opening the letter postmarked Atlin. Strange, indeed, that another person can enter one's heart and hold it so completely, so incredibly

fully, that this one affection matters more than anything else, even more than life itself.

Audrey claimed to have recovered from her recent illness, but things were not going so well. The Vista House had not proven a financial success as a roadhouse. She was disappointed at the skeptical and even hostile attitude of many acquaintances and even former friends. Some official was also making himself extremely obnoxious by demanding unreasonably high payments for the privilege of selling liquor. Audrey concluded that somebody else was wanting the place, but she was going to stick it out until the lease terminated, no matter what happened. "You are damned if you do and you are damned if you don't" was the closing comment of a paragraph on the little love and tolerance of this world. A wave of bitterness and hatred swept through me, and I realized that I should never have left her in the difficult position of a reformed mistress of the Vista House. The long letter ended with expressions of sentiment, simple, frank, and touching and without a note of discord. Even the words seemed to have been chosen with discriminating taste, seemed sensitive and delicate as if spun by the same thoughts which had inspired them. They tugged and tugged at my heartstrings as I read the letter over and over again.

No matter how much I trusted Audrey I could not sever from my mind a strong presentiment that something had gone wrong. Her strongest hold on

herself was her love for me, but I knew that her mind, if not her heart, still viewed life from the dangerous angle of one disillusioned and sophisticated. I did not hold it above her to take another plunge into the life of a courtesan, that is, if she deemed it necessary to survive or to achieve some imperative objective. Disobedience to a moral rule might not displace her love for me, but it certainly would endanger my affections for her. I could never forgive her!

The letter I wrote in reply seemed like a confusing rhapsody of thoughts. I felt, however, that the occasion demanded an impassioned appeal if it was going to help a brave little woman facing alone a community so hostile or indifferent to moral reform. I also asked her to cable me if in need of money.

A NOTHER month passed. To my surprise I was promoted, this time to the responsible but hazardous job of "rope-riding," that is, in charge of all cars leaving and entering the mine. At first it was work to my liking: interesting as a game with high stakes and keeping one's senses sharp, alert and sensitive to mental control without involving a great deal of physical effort. After breaking all previous records for output during a single eight-hour shift, I was nicknamed "king rope-rider," and the superintendent offered me steady work, besides increasing my wages. Then one day I barely escaped being injured or killed in a smash-up, and the work lost all of its old appeal. Dangers now seemed to lurk everywhere, and I learned to know what "spectre of fear" can mean.

The principal reason for this accident as well as many minor ones was the difficulty of getting equipment or parts, making prompt and proper repairs difficult. Consequently something was always going wrong and staying so. The friction

on the mine hoist had a most annoying tendency to slip. The full extent of danger was never realized until one day when the engineer neglected to keep his foot on the emergency brake while lowering a long string of cars. The hoist friction failed, and before the engineer could even realize what was happening my "trip" was piled up at the bottom of the steep mine shaft. The steam pipe to the pumps broke, escaping steam scalding and drenching me as I crawled out of the one and only undamaged car. I had a heavy load of mining props and two cars were filled with dynamite, but I suppose it was not meant to be the end even if the stage was set for an extremely sudden termination of my existence. Having only partially recovered my senses I staggered out of the steaming hole, possessed of a mad desire to kill the careless engineer. A wonder, indeed, that the ashen-faced culprit survived the unmentionable invectives heaped upon him first by myself and then by the angry miners who one by one managed to escape through the air shafts. We did not lay our hands on him, although the mine boss administered a swift kick after telling him to beat it.

My narrow escape was the talk of the camp for a long time. The accident left me in a very nervous state of mind. But by the time the mine was again pumped out and the work resumed, I did not mind going back, although dislike for coal mining had gradually grown into a much stronger

form of antipathy. Blackdamp was unpleasantly prevalent, fire had broken out in several places, and one section of the mine was caving in, despite frantic efforts to support the tunnels and shafts. Strong props broke like matches when different strata of coal and slate settled and moved in an incredibly active manner for solid rock. Another time a miner happened to leave several sticks of frozen dynamite on the cylinder-head of one of the pumps. Thawing dynamite is not supposed to act as it did this time, but contrary to all rules it exploded and the result was another flooded mine and another grand scramble for safety. Incidentally, I had passed the pumps only a few minutes before the disaster occurred. Such happenings, combined with scant and infrequent news from Audrey, made life in Slate Creek more irksome every day and finally I made up my mind to quit at least a couple of weeks before the "freeze-up."

Audrey's letters conveyed an emotional and erotic appeal so strong and so sincere that I could not have wished for more, but she simply refused to dwell on the more material aspects of our love affair. Knowing her practical mind, I suspected that she was deliberately withholding something. She also declined to accept my money, and only her repeated assurance that she did not need any stopped me from disregarding her wishes in the matter. In the last letter she stated that arrange-

ments had been made to leave Atlin in time to catch the last boat for Dawson City.

The nights were growing long and cold. A sharp mountain wind traveled more swiftly on its daily jaunt up or down our narrow valley. Large flocks of birds were winging their way southward, and one morning there was a heavy coat of frost on the planks around the mine pit. Someone remarked:

"It won't be long now before the last boat comes down the river."

At noon the same day I called at the office for my wages, bid my many friends goodbye, and caught the train as it left for the river landing.

This was the first time since leaving home that I had experienced the feeling of safety and satisfaction which is incidental to material affluence. I had over four hundred dollars, enough for a comfortable winter grubstake, enough to realize our original plans to go to Koyukuk, and, best of all, enough for the one whom I hoped soon to call mine.

There was no boat available in Fortymile. Instead of waiting a week or more, I decided to join a party of miners leaving overland for Dawson. During this interesting trip I had the first opportunity to test my new 30-30 carbine. I picked out a young caribou buck in a passing herd and a perfect hit in the head killed him instantly. Other caribou came within easy range, but we had the sense and decency to refrain—we had enough meat.

With the almost ravenous but healthy appetite

which is merely incidental to being alive and roaming trails of the North, we gathered around our campfire for a feast on the most delicious meat I believe I have ever tasted. We were hungry, to be true, yet I cannot understand how it was possible for a party of only five to eat so much meat that there was barely enough left over for another day. One of our companions told us he had once seen a caribou trek somewhere near where I felled the buck. The migrating herd was so large, he claimed, that it was necessary to stop several hours before being able to get through. Other sourdoughs in our party verified it by similar stories.

Late one evening Dawson City loomed up on the opposite shore of Yukon River. The light evening haze and a thin, fluffy blanket of fog over the water appeared to have lifted the city until it looked almost like a long, noninverted mirage floating in the air. I closed my eyes and thought that I could see Audrey standing there waiting for me.

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IT WAS still a matter of over a week before the arrival of the last boat from Whitehorse. I felt that I had earned a rest and with this in view I first rented a cabin for what seemed a great deal of money, although it represented only a fraction of the cost of staying in the most modest hotel. My resolution to economize by cooking my own meals was not lived up to. Even my best culinary efforts proved unsatisfactory and were finally confined to cooking oatmeal for breakfast. Most of my time was spent in the Carnegie Library. It was a friendly oasis in a moral and cultural desert, and this philanthropic institution must have spared many a miner the consequences of loneliness and boredom.

Occasionally I dropped in to chat with the bartender in the Bonanza Saloon. My unexpected temperance was a fact lamented by him and several others who had participated in that memorable party in the spring. When uninvited melancholy held me in its relentless grip I was tempted to find forgetfulness in the most expedient manner known

to me, but I had a kind though absent confessor and many good books so there was no need to seek relief in drinking.

Long hikes in the vicinity of Dawson gave me some of the happiest moments of this tranquil time. Alone but never lonely I discovered many trails leading to something new in my search for the old. Within a radius of only a few miles I saw enough to make me realize the incredible waste of time and effort which is incidental to mining. Innumerable quartz-veins and many exposed deposits of different ores lured me to dream even if I knew that "all is not gold that glitters." One day I strayed away to Moosehide, the nearest Indian village. Among many things of interest I also discovered that really beautiful Indian maidens actually exist; in fact, quite a number of them. The appeal of these brown-skinned and dark-eyed women, of whom I had heard a great deal, was quite obvious and, perhaps, not at all strange when one considers the fascination of almost everything close to nature—primitive and unspoiled and simple. Once I saw a young half-breed girl, still in her teens, who could have been described as a living incarnation of a new and an old race—a phoenix rising out of the ashes. And some who have been close to Nature claim that only in the nearness of Nature's own aboriginal soul can one ever hope to achieve the fullness of physical if not intellectual contentment.

In Moosehide one felt nearer an age antedating the advent of white man. Everybody appeared to be his own simple, artless, and unchangeable self—children of the earth, living and dreaming in their yesteryears. Something, of which I had never been conscious before, stirred and throbbed with a peculiar feeling of awe as I passed by a hut and heard the shrill screams of a squaw, evidently in violent throes of childbirth. This clarion call of life was too natural to excite or frighten even one as sensitive to suffering of others as I. But I remembered a similar occurrence a few years ago when it had struck such terror in my heart that I fled into a stormy winter night to escape hearing the arrival of life in a neighbor's house. Death, however, would undoubtedly have left me quite calm and collected—birth makes one feel; death makes one think.

The day had been warm, but there was now some of the sharp cold of a typical Yukon autumn night in the air when early in the afternoon I sauntered along the boardwalk of Main Street, once more bound for nowhere after reading and playing chess in the library. On an empty lot near the river front I stopped to watch a large, captive bear. Recently a friend had had his trousers torn so I knew better than to get too close. This belligerent giant had been caught a few miles from Slate Creek where there is a section particularly suited to bears. Only men with good guns care to venture into

their strongholds, and I was once told by a professional hunter that the topography of the country is such that these splendid beasts may never be exterminated.

Opposite Dawson City, across the Klondike River, is situated its infamous suburb, suggestively and quite properly named Lousetown. At its farthest end rose the tall smokestack of a brewery over the many nondescript lumber shacks and log cabins. When I came up to the bridge leading there, my roving eyes noticed the red tunic of a mounted policeman as he entered through the swinging doors of a saloon. Despite my curiosity, I had always avoided Lousetown because of its suggestive connection with one so dear to me.

The expected presence of Audrey's aunt was no added feature of attraction. Undecided whether to continue across the bridge or to return, I straddled the railing to think it over. Suppose Audrey were here, I asked myself, among this "frail sisterhood" now plying its abject trade in these cribs—would I then be able to view matters as I did now? If she were in Lousetown her youth and beauty would soon be known throughout the length and breadth of this masculine land, soon to be wasted, soon to be another tragedy of the kind which makes one shudder at the indifference and brutal selfishness and lust of man. Many would boast of having helped to singe the wings of such a lovely butterfly. How intensely grateful I felt for the knowl-

edge that we would never have to face something which irrevocably belonged to a dead past. Audrey knew the horror of a vice which drags both men and women down to unbelievable depths of depravity and degeneracy. The life of a courtesan could have no appeal of gaiety and glamour to her. Through her aunt she had also learned to know the fate of many a "Georgie May."

Hoping that at this early hour I might be able to take in the exterior sights of Lousetown without even being observed, I decided to risk the feared encounter with Audrey's relative. Surely my fiancée would not question my motive; in any event I really should have something to tease her about when we met. That longed-for meeting was now only a week ahead, so close that I would soon begin to count the hours.

There was no one in sight on the narrow streets. Drawn curtains indicated inactivity, although several gramophones were already at work grinding out jazzy music. Evidently the hour of breakfast had arrived only in a few "cribs." I judged that most of these cabins consisted of two or three rooms. Invariably they had only one main entrance opening directly to the narrow plank sidewalks. The mounted police left the saloon just as I passed, and he treated me to a cheerful greeting, quite unexpected from one of his rather reserved profession. After walking another block I saw him cross the bridge on his way back to Dawson.

In order to obtain a better view of a log cabin of an unusual rustic design I turned into a narrow alley. When closer, I noticed that it must have been built more to attract attention than to conform with any architectural style. Lost in speculations, I was startled when a voice from behind greeted me with professional affectation:

"Haloh, Kid!"

Quickly I turned and looked into the widening eyes of a middle-aged woman. It was Audrey's aunt, and although we had never met, I could tell by the surprised look on her painted face that the recognition was mutual. Her smile froze into a fixed stare. I could not have found words if my life had depended upon something to say, and the tense pause that followed did not end until something like: "I'll be damned!" escaped between her thin lips. It was Audrey's aunt—every description fitted her: a lean, sinewy neck, protruding collarbones, dark and oddly expressive eyes set deep in a face that had paid for artificial beauty by losing all that is normally human. I blushed, stammered, and acted true to the uncontrollable emotions which welled up in me, but in any event this woman also acted in a manner I felt was not at all justified merely by the occasion of the meeting. She had seen me once and undoubtedly knew of me, but I was positive her knowledge must be of a very scant nature. My own reactions were not caused merely by instant and intense dislike, but

also by the hatred Audrey had inspired toward her grim-faced relative.

"You are Donn?" she asked, barely opening her lips.

"Yes, and if I'm not mistaken, you're Audrey's aunt."

Her look of surprise was quickly giving away to an expression of hostility, and there was a hissing sound in her voice when she demanded:

"What are you doing here?"

Ignoring her question I asked:

"Have you heard from your niece?"

"None of your damn business if I have," was her sharp retort. "If I were you, I'd beat it. It isn't going to be healthy around here for you."

Despite the mutual dislike, her hostile attitude toward me seemed so uncalled-for that I was dumbfounded. I controlled myself, but a presentiment of something strange and puzzling as a more concrete cause for her actions, carried me far away from the tempest of this scene. Could it be that something had happened to my fiancée? All my old suspicions rushed forward to claim solutions to Audrey's peculiar letters. The woman continued to harangue and threaten me, but she might as well have talked to a deaf man for all the attention I now gave her.

For a while I stood lost in thoughts made tense by a vague fear. After I had turned to leave, I heard a door open and then slam shut. I felt that

my name could not have been spoken with more of the weirdness of unreality than it was after I had walked but a few steps from the angry harlot of Lousetown.

"Donn.... Donn...."

It was Audrey's voice and it was Audrey's arms around my neck in a tight clasp before I even realized what was happening. Her kisses nearly smothered me, and I crushed her to my breast oblivious of everything but her and our love.

When I recovered power of speech, we were alone in a large bedroom. Audrey had ordered out her aunt who was now keeping it up quite audibly in an adjoining room.

"How come you're here?" I asked. "I expected you on the next boat."

Audrey clung to me closer, but I noticed that my question made her wince.

"I lost everything I had up in Atlin," she explained hesitatingly, avoiding my eyes. "My aunt sent me some money, so I came on the boat a week ago. I just couldn't ask you to help me. I was afraid you wouldn't understand."

"Why, Audrey!" I exclaimed. "Have I ever failed you yet? Don't you know that I realize what you have been up against? Worries about you have nearly driven me mad, but I knew you were going straight and besides that and our love, nothing really matters—does it, dear?"

"Donn, I—oh, please forgive me! I meant to do the right thing by you."

Sobbing, she pressed her face against my shoulder. I could not understand why she acted so impulsively unless she was unstrung by the unexpected meeting.

"Now, don't cry, little one," I pleaded. "You'll go with me now, and all will be well. I've got enough money to last for a while yet."

"I owe my aunt quite a lot," she said in a voice not at all her own. "Guess she'll wait though."

A sickening feeling of distress swept over me. I certainly could not see any reason for her hesitancy, for her peculiar remarks. Gently I broke our embrace and held her at arm's length and then looked searchingly into her eyes. How strikingly beautiful she was, lovelier than ever, I thought, even if more thin and wan-faced. The dark rings around her eyes were even darker than I had known them to be that one time when the same telltale sign had distressed me so deeply. Could it be that she had.... Oh, no, it could not be possible that she had broken a pledge which meant everything to our love and happiness. I hated myself for wanting to ask her that question. I had no right even to permit a doubt to enter my mind. Still, why was she here? I looked around in a room so suggestive of the abode of a demimonde. Audrey was dressed only in silk pajamas under a heavy kimono. I noticed a colorful and fantastic

Chinese design on its back. The comparatively early hour might have accounted for the extremely scant clothing, I thought, or perhaps. . . . Then I could no longer resist the temptation and I asked bluntly:

"Audrey, dear, you are not. . . . You are going straight, aren't you?"

Her lips moved, but she did not answer audibly, only bent her head, kneeling as she humbled herself before me. No need to tell with words when it could be done with mute eloquence. And the way the color ebbed from her face was also an answer. I swayed from a blow which dulled me almost into insensibility. It seemed an age before I could find my voice.

"How could you?" I cried. "Don't you love me any more? Doesn't my love mean anything to you now? You must have known how I feel about what you promised to do."

"I couldn't help myself," she replied, speaking very low and slowly. "You don't know what I've gone through, Donn. I went straight until I came here, but I had to pay. . . ."

She locked her mouth tightly after a low cry had escaped.

"Pay that hag in there," I said contemptuously. "Same old story—blaming someone else. No, it's you that's yellow, you contemptible little hussy, you! So I couldn't trust you. Should have known that it isn't in you or your kind. Wish I had never

met you—you need a pimp, not one who still has a little sense of decency—don't touch me!"

Her face went white as a sheet, and her eyes looked empty as if all life had gone out of them.

"No, Donn, not that," she cried, "please don't say that! I love you—I'll kill myself if you leave me—please—please!"

"Stop bawling," I blurted out grimly. "This is one time when it isn't going to help you. Crawling there like a scared bitch! Get up and join your fine friends here."

I heard my own voice as though it had been a stranger speaking for me. My arm caught some support or I would have fallen. Then something taut within me snapped, and I struck her upturned face with my fist, struck and struck again without warning, brutally hard in blind rage. Without even trying to shield herself she rose, but only to sway and fall with a heavy thud against the side of the bed, and there I let her lie, limp and ashen-faced in a dead swoon. Like one possessed, I cursed and threatened the woman I had loved, the lovely creature I had held in my arms but a few minutes ago. Hard words, harder than any I had ever known, poured out their stinging accusations, trying to inflict a punishment even more severe than physical pain. Perhaps she did not hear my mad ravings, perhaps every word failed to penetrate a merciful darkness around her mind, but I was stark mad and felt that everything had come to an end. Then

she turned, and I saw blood trickle from a corner of her quivering mouth. Her bare arm reached out and she clutched at my leg as I was leaving, but I kicked away even something no one in the world could know better than I how exquisitely soft and tender and caressing it could be.

Several loud and excited women, evidently summoned by her aunt to assist, were now demanding that I open the locked door. Before anyone had thought of the back door I managed my inglorious exit. Lost in the whirling maelstrom of my deranged mind, I forgot all about myself and my own guilt. Like a drunken man I reeled through the alley and down the street leading to the bridge. Once I stumbled and fell. Audrey's aunt and another kimono-clad woman were out on the sidewalk hurling threats and the vilest oaths at me, and I heard doors and windows open along the street. However, an apparently intoxicated boy and a few enraged inmates must have been a sight too common to arouse much interest, because nobody seemed willing to join the fracas except by laughing at us. I felt as if I were carrying away my heart as a corpse, and nothing responsive stirred within me even when I heard my name called out once more in Audrey's own tremulous voice, calling me back in her hour of need.

The wind blew cold and swift down the valley. During a brief moment of calm in the turmoil of my mind I thought of its message of winter and

loneliness. Everything had now turned bleak and grey and desolate, strangely changed, it seemed, to be in tune with what I felt. Sudden gusts lashed the air like a giant whip, and when I passed the saloon the wind howled and whined around the cabins and then whispered as it spent itself among the leafless branches of a clump of birch trees by the river bank. Convulsively I clutched and tore at my shirt, opening it to cool the fever in my chest. Strangely remote, another scream rent the air, and then all was quiet. . . .

My last memory of this night is from a few hours later when I was leaning heavily against a bar, drunk almost to oblivion, and pouring out a maudlin and incoherent story to anyone willing to listen. As I was treating to drinks there was no lack of interest and sympathy.

And thus I had chosen one of the two roads leading out of Lousetown—one of the only two.

DON'T preach to me," I admonished the bartender while drinking at the Eldorado Bar. "I know what I'm doing. Why, moralizing has been a pastime of mine for years, but I never knew until now what a damn fool I've been. I haven't gone to the dogs yet, but I'm going to have a fling at it until I get over this. It's the only way out of the mess that I know of."

Until now I had never known how easy, how surprisingly easy it is to sneer and to snarl at things. "I don't give a damn!" was more than a mere gesture or empty figure of speech. It depicted what I actually felt; it summarized my despair and it was a cinching and soothing argument when all my faith and philosophy had failed. My friend, the bartender, was really moralizing. It is serious, indeed, when a member of his profession indulges in didactics of this unprofessional nature. He had always been very friendly, although I knew that my poke was preferred to the friendship. Incidentally, three days and nights of continuous heavy

drinking had reduced the contents of my money belt to a few bills of small denomination and, no doubt, the bartender was aware of that unpleasant fact.

The more maudlin condition of my booze-demented mind had been of a relatively short duration. It soon changed, and I grew harder and less susceptible to sentiment the more I drank. I found that there can be a terribly real pleasure in destroying; in fact, an emotion akin to ecstasy is the sudden and wild frenzy which wrecks and dares.

"Another absinthe, Bill," I jabbered away, "the day is young, you know. I'll tell you how I feel about it—listen! For the last four or five years I've been trying to build up what they called 'philosophy of life' at college. Never mind what it means, just listen. I had a lot of notions about women, such as purity, romance, faith, and so on. I fell for a hussy with a pretty face—the prettiest in all the world. She didn't get my money, but she got everything else. Now I'm glad, because I think it's going to save me a lot of trouble in the future. *Skaal*, Bill! This green stuff must be good for one's soul—it sure feels like it. Oh, cheer up, Bill, last night is only a memory, and we just had a good time."

I have often wondered if one's brain really is as clear as it seems after two or three drinks of absinthe in the morning after a real "spree." To soar into the dazzling space of moral and intellectual

freedom is a privilege given us mortals, but only for a price exacted by some satanic extortioner who seems so real that man has justly made him a deity.

"You say they kicked me out of Anderson's saloon last night? Guess that's where I got that big bump on my head, ha, ha. . . ."

My laugh must have rung scornful. "You know, Bill, I'm going to tear down everything I've built up around me, and I'm not quite through yet. Maybe I can put a more substantial abode on a heap of dust and dirt than on a lot of damn fool nonsense. What do you think?"

Assisted by a couple of inebrate companions, I had messed up the bartender's room a couple of nights ago, and his friendship was not so apparent after this hilarious event. However, I was surprised when he blustered out:

"Get out of here and don't ever show up again!"

I shrugged my shoulders and complied although I felt blood mounting in my cheeks. "I don't give a damn!" was all I said. Somehow I was strangely conscious of strengthened indifference whenever I spoke the hard words. I loved the very sound of the idiomatic phrase which contained so much profound meaning to me, contained the gist of my new philosophy of despair. Two saloons already, where my presence was not desired! Nothing slow about me! More places remained, of course, although I could not help but reflect upon the poignant fact that it certainly had not required much time to ac-

complish this. Still it seemed that an incredibly long time had elapsed since the happening in Louston. I never rehearsed the scene—the curtain was down and even the thought of its ever being raised again tortured me like a burning flame. For some inexplicable reason I insisted upon viewing my love affair as if it had been a stage play. Sometimes I was on the stage, sometimes among the patrons of Thespis' gentle art—perhaps quite natural for the muddled and bewildered mind of one who has known and loved the stage since childhood. But I was never so drunk that I could think of Audrey without feeling as if her little hands were around my heart trying to crush it. Still I could fling her away at will, hurl the spectre of her from my mind with less effort than a muttered curse.

One of my companions had borrowed a considerable sum of money from me. While there was some left in my own purse, I did not give the matter much thought although I had misgivings. His name was Doane, and I admired him especially for his sophistication and his ability to act as if sober even after consuming large quantities of liquor. He was frail and extremely nervous, but apparently immune to the usual effects of drinking. His sister had once figured in a murder case of national importance, at least from a journalistic viewpoint. That relationship was also his one and only claim to distinction—and he claimed it without any

compunction. Sentiment certainly was no outstanding characteristic in his mental make-up, and his brutally cynical attitude toward women had a sort of demoniac glamour which fascinated me. Even if my conduct had not pleased a couple of saloonkeepers, my money and education made me eligible to a clique consisting of several remittance men, one or two professional gamblers, and a sprinkling of friendly rogues to whom liquor meant more than anything else in the world.

No mortal could have suffered more than I did after every drinking bout. My only relief was in more liquor. The excruciating torture demanded more to drink and drove me with fiendish strength back into another repetition of a previous night's intoxication. It astonished me to find that so many others felt as I did after a wild night, and there was solace just in sharing one supremely despotic desire with kindred souls. Drunkards are nearer to one another by having something so actual and imperative in common, and this companionship means a great deal more to them than most people know.

I have often wondered if every English colony shelters as many likable, interesting and irresponsible failures from England as the Yukon Territory. Their vagrant ways and vagarious minds would not fit in any place, be it Dawson or London; still the old country needs not be ashamed of its wayward sons. They belong close to Nature's own bosom.

They are restless, adventurous, and ever young in spirit if not always happy with so many memories preying on their minds. Some of the best join the Mounted Police, and one finds them down the line of all professions, some of which require neither pride nor self-respect. One of the members of our clique was known to be "swamping" in a saloon in return for meals, lodging, and a few drinks. No one ever mentioned that in his presence because he was too tall, too broad-shouldered, and the glint of hard pride was never dimmed in his grey eyes. All I ever learned of his past was that he was born in Stratford-on-Avon where his mother still lived. I also found out that he could discuss Shakespeare and classic literature intelligently without appearing affected or supercilious—a true sign of a true scholar.

Upon entering the Nugget Saloon I found my tall friend, whom I knew as Jim, slumped in a chair and looking quite seedy for a man always so particular about his appearance. We had both managed to evade arrest after a brawl in a log cabin where we had spent part of the last hectic evening. I had a hazy memory of being helped out through a window just as several "redcoats" rushed in. We were on friendly terms with a number of men on the force, but this noisy affair which had developed into a fight was a little too much even for these tolerant minions of His Majesty's law. Jim brightened up when he saw me

and solicited a drink in the same breath as the curt greeting. He was broke and had failed to locate any of his friends and was now "dying" for a drink. Jim was a very proud man and had not yet descended to a point where he would ask anybody but his closest friends for the stuff which was burning him up. I could appreciate how he felt and I needed the fellowship of a kindred soul so we walked up to the bar.

"Donn," he said in his deep voice, "if you hadn't been so stubborn last night and refused to go with the other gang to Lousetown, we would never have gotten into that mess over at Charlie's place. I grabbed you by the collar and dragged you out through the window. Guess we are the only ones who needn't face the court this morning, besides getting in bad with the 'redcoats.' Say, you seem to have a load already?"

"Never enough, Jim, never!" I replied, laughing with affected cynicism. "And when I'm broke I'm going to beat it for the hills and hide out where the devil himself can't find me—won't be long now."

An old, blear-eyed sourdough whom I had often seen loitering around the saloons, now approached us. For a moment he hesitated as if not quite sure of something. I expected him to ask for a drink, but I was in no mood for charity and when he finally shuffled up to me I was ready to turn him down.

"Are you Donn . . . ?" he asked, giving a name only Audrey and a few intimate friends knew.

When I nodded in the affirmative he handed me a letter. Strange how quickly some impulsive power can assume such absolute control over almost every function of one's body. I was sure my heart stopped beating for a moment and I felt dazed and cold and rigid as if it had suddenly turned below zero. Jim told me later that he had never seen a face so completely drained of color as mine, which should mean something coming from a veteran of several wars. Ignoring another question, I turned away and read Audrey's short letter.

"Dear Donn:

"Please do come back to me and let us forget and forgive. Surely you still love me even if you cannot understand. I swear by all that is dear to me that I love you. I shall die before I give you up. The other day you staggered by within just a few feet but you were so drunk and looked so hard that I did not dare to speak to you. I don't blame you for acting the way you do and no matter what happens I shall be waiting—I must wait because no other man is ever going to enter my life—only you! Please let me prove to you that I love you, that I have always loved you—just one more chance. You won't find me in. . . ."

I could not, for all the world, have read the rest of the sentence and the few lines that followed. The words had become blurred, and they moved

and twisted into crazy shapes. But I had read enough. I was conscious of actually being afraid of myself, of my utter lack of any responsive sentiment. Something I had never known before welled up in my heart, and there was neither a kind thought nor a tender feeling within me. All the effects of a dozen or more drinks on an empty stomach had been erased. I had never felt so sober since leaving the writer of that letter!

While tearing it slowly, almost mechanically, into little shreds and watching the paper flakes pirouette and glide to the floor by the polished brass railing, I ordered another round of drinks, asking the bartender to make mine a double whiskey. Then I turned to Jim and tried to smile. As I raised my glass the old man tapped me on the shoulder.

"She told me to wait for a reply," he said.

My hand holding the glass had been steady, but now it began to shake, suddenly seized by an uncontrollable fit of trembling. A rush of blood burned my cheeks. I felt weak and faint, and my fumbling hands grabbed the edge of the bar for support. More whiskey than I managed to drink was spilled, and then the glass slipped out of my jerking fingers before I could lower it to the bar. The bartender tried to catch it but the glass rolled away and crashed to the floor. Without looking at the messenger I answered with slow, hard deliberation:

"Tell her to go to.... Tell Audrey to go... where she belongs. That is my message!"

And all I remember of the chaos that followed was drinking, drinking for hours, or days, or ages....

DOANE had unusually small and beautiful hands. They attracted one's attention as characteristic of his personality. They also intrigued me with a quality of something odd and indefinable. Despite their artistic appearance his fingers seemed too short for any musical instrument, too nervous for a pen, and I could not associate them with a painter's easel and palette. Besides, they were too carefully kept for a man living in Alaska.

Without looking up from his ceaseless labor of manicuring, Doane asked me in his low, slightly tremulous voice:

"How about slipping away tonight with a couple of girls I know?"

His ivory-white hands and his restless, feminine fingers held my eyes as I deliberated a moment before acknowledging the invitation with another question:

"Natives?"

"Yes, Donn," he answered. "Half sisters, one a half-breed though. There isn't a better looking

girl in Dawson, I think. The little squaw is shy like a deer, but she likes her booze," he continued slowly, sarcastically slowly, "almost as well as you do. Are you coming?" My new acquaintance had an established reputation which was of a rather unsavory nature, and he specialized in making love to native women. Not having had any experience, I did not understand his preference but could guess what it was. Women meant only one thing to my companions, and I had already commenced to envy them their heartless and sophisticated conception of love.

"Maybe Ed was right," I thought to myself. "Why not play like him with passions that have no moral ties. Love, ha! I certainly ought to know what it means...."

Doane was accustomed to my erratic speculation but his eyes widened with surprise, and he gave a short, nervous laugh when I broke away from my silent thoughts and continued aloud:

"...after making such a damn fool of myself. Sure, John, I'm with you. What's the squaw's name?"

"Eve. She's working for a friend of mine, but he and his wife are out of town tonight. I'll arrange everything. By the way, she lives only a few yards from your cabin so it will be handy. You can have Eve. I'll take her sister."

When the appointed time for the party finally came, I happened to be unusually sober for such a

late hour of the night. My companion was already at the place although I arrived ahead of time. He appeared rather confused when introducing the two dusky beauties.

"Can't get a word out of them," he whispered.

For a while we kept up a forced conversation with uncomfortably long intervals of silence. To extract even a single word from the sisters proved a difficult task until Bacchus had established his reign and broken down barriers of race and reserve.

The half-breed was more attractive than her younger half sister, but Eve appeared to be less spoiled, and she emanated something so sweet, primitive, and inherently natural that I soon experienced a wild desire sweeping over me. And I learned again that when hot blood stirs in one's face and heart it is, indeed, easy to forget. I was conscious of a vision which could come true so easily in an *Erewhon* of aboriginal freedom. A young man and a little squaw with eyes of midnight dark would be seen hitting the trail to some remote place where trapping and hunting and fishing were still good. Some people who do not understand such things might say: "Queer that he, with his education, youth, and culture, and family, turned squawman—why, he might have had his pick from the best of girls in any white man's town." Perhaps, but could anyone ever be as happy with one of them as with this wide-eyed and silent daughter of nature in whom love must

be like a burning flame of raw, pagan love—and nothing else?

I had heard how taciturn Indians can be and these girls certainly excelled in impassive silence. Liquor loosened their tongues, but only to reveal their simple and limited perspectives. It was not stupidity, I thought, which restricted the sphere of their minds. They were earth-bound, although still in infinite harmony with the fierce, throbbing pulse of life itself and wealthy with a latent something probably less illusory than my own artificial culture and education. I began to feel that I could learn to like the docile little squaw now snuggling close to me like a sleepy child. And that love, or whatever it should be called, might mould me like soft clay into another man and bring me the gift of forgetfulness and tranquillity—also bringing back, through one who was born knowing them, the ineffable things in nature white man has forgotten.

When I pressed my lips against Eve's, I knew that I had never before felt such burning passion in a kiss. And when she finally lay limp and panting in my arms, I had known the fullness of another kind of love.

Shrouded in heavy morning fog, Dawson looked like the setting for some eerie show when I left my Indian inamorata and returned to a cabin where I was almost a stranger. My head was clear and calm. Although dead tired, I dreaded to go to bed because during the last few nights my sleep

had always been marred by terrible nervous disturbances. There was no "still small voice within," no regrets whatever—rather a sort of keen satisfaction over having dared and grinned and mocked at my idols of senility, at the damns and don'ts of cold moral precepts. I was showing myself and Audrey that I had the courage of going to hell. What about it if I yielded to temptations? Eve was a warm, living thing, and I was not made of marble. Even if labeled by the world as sin, these acts of indiscretion, or worse, might some day be my best memories—who knows? Perhaps I would be glad and thankful to have the means of stealing away from the humdrum and live over again some of those adventures I was either too weak to resist or not afraid to experience. There is no loss without a gain. This time I fancied that I had settled a score with Audrey, although we were by no means square.

My fear of sleep proved well founded. During that long morning I went through the most horrible nightmare or delirious fit I believe possible for a human mind to endure. It remained so real in all its stark terror that it took more than double the usual quantity of whiskey to throw off the burden of sober consciousness and regain control over my tangled nerves. These and subsequent experiences brought home the realization that it was about time to reform.

Retrospection was something in which I seldom

indulged during these days, but as I walked down town one morning I did some pertinent thinking. Among other things, I figured out that more than a month had elapsed since my return from Slate Creek, also that I was broke unless some money could be extracted from Doane, who now owed me about one hundred dollars; in fact, my philandering companion was the only source I knew of for the price of the next meal or the next drink.

When I was drinking at the Yukon Bar, an old man with calm and friendly eyes walked up to me.

"Pardon me, son, but I feel I should speak to you," he said. "I am an old man and I know something about life. I've watched you and I am sure you need a friend. You are young, healthy, well educated and apparently from a good home—am I right?"

"Yes," I admitted dryly, "but what about it?"

"Oh, I just hate to see anybody go to hell—you are going there, young man, as you well know. Why do you drink like this?"

"Why—hm." Pausing, I debated with myself how I should best answer him. "Well, I figure it's good for what's ailing me, that's all!"

"And what's that, pray tell? Won't you confide in an old man, one who would like to be your friend?"

He placed his hand lightly on my shoulder. I turned, looked into his kindly but probing eyes and

yielded despite my growing resentment against the intrusion.

"Don't care if I do. I was just fool enough to fall in love with a—a—a sporting girl. In other words I loved neither wisely nor well, ha, ha, ha! As to your friendship, I don't want it. Please mind your own business!"

It was rude of me, but I did not want anyone, not even the altruistic old philosopher this man might have been, to share or alleviate my troubles. I could, however, not forget how hurt he looked and after pondering for a while over his poignant remarks, I really wished, as drunk as I was, that I had accepted his offer.

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HERE but for the grace of God goes. . . ." One may point to many derelicts of man and realize how little it would take for oneself to become something similar—I have lost all arrogance in this respect. If I could have stepped away just a few feet from myself—as he, my "alter ego," sat slumped in one of the uncomfortable chairs provided for the patrons of the Yukon Saloon I might have found him quite an interesting, if not common or typical, type of man. Just a glance would have told anyone that he had been in the habit of sleeping in his clothes, eating irregularly, and generally being a bit worse off for liquor. Undoubtedly an observant and kindly student would have tried to discover some extenuating circumstances in this obvious case of dissipation just to acknowledge the apotheosis of youth and culture, even if disfigured or disguised almost beyond recognition. Well, I was not looking at myself yet, and my perspective of life was at present refracted through a yellow liquid which kept me from going mad. Only two alter-

natives remained when I stood on the narrow bridge across Klondike River looking in a trance of cloudy puzzlement at its muddy water. And I had not chosen the one of least resistance even if the world generally considers drinking as the choice of cowards.

Although by far the most cruel, the most painfully cruel in exacting its toll at the end of the road to forgetfulness, liquor can help one forget when sober thoughts would drive one mad. My personal habits were shocking even to myself. I was going "native"! I longed for Mother, but that was the nearest I ever came to a prayer. Her soft words of compassion, her caresses while resting a bewildered and tired head in her lap, her forgiveness, and her kisses would have meant heaven to me.

My companions could by no means be called discriminating, but my utter neglect of personal appearance did not meet with their approval, and they did not hesitate to say so. My tragedy, so supremely paramount to me, was plainly more like a farce to them, and I do not remember a single word of sympathy and understanding. My money was gone; I had ceased to serve a purpose in their scheme. I knew I looked and felt the part, but still I did not care. However, when capable of a clearer thought, I realized that it would not be long before despair had caught up with me in this mad race. Pitiless remorse and disgust flashed like lightning across the deranged realm of my mind, and

there were moments when I could have screamed in anguish. Something as inevitable as a preordained fate was sweeping me closer to the vortex which whirled around the climax—to sober up was the same as crossing the bridge on my way back to Audrey, to live it over again, to face its stark terror again. To avoid that memory and the very thought of Audrey until I could do so with a changed outlook was my principal reason for staying drunk. It might be courage to meet all the issues of life squarely, still I shall never be convinced that it is cowardice to escape madness as I did with the aid of one of mankind's most expedient anodynes.

To hate and to love—strange affinities—but I hated the girl who had lied to me and cheated and deceived me and yet I loved her in sort of intuitive manner, beyond my understanding, beyond sense and reason as I saw it. She was like a beautiful statue in the marketplace, a corpse lovely in death, an enthralling romance with a tragic ending. Audrey was a living thing only in memories. "Always waiting," she had written. Waiting, ha! The same as for other men except that I had paid for her love with my very soul, with the best and only I could offer a woman—never again! Rather death or oblivion!

After much persuasion I managed to extract a few dollars from Doane, but it was evident that he was going to owe me the rest of the money a long,

long time. Winter was here. The camps were closing down, and most of the prospectors had already left. The bartenders were as a rule indifferent and in some cases unfriendly. I began to feel out of place and almost every visit to a saloon induced a new attack of nostalgia—evidently a sign of recovering a little sense. Rather late in the game, to be true, but better so than never, I thought with the words of the old saying. However, whiskey still meant more than food to me; in fact, it meant more than anything else, and I dreaded the thought of the day when I could no longer procure the yellow fluid which held my nerves and mind under control. A sourdough offered the timely suggestion that I stake myself a rabbit claim, as he called it, around one of the many deserted cabins near Dawson and wait for better days to come. Grub to last several weeks would not cost much, and my gun and a few other valuables could easily be turned into cash.

Little pools of ice-coated water dotted the streets like pieces of broken glass and the north wind was blowing bitterly cold. Only a week or so and the ice cakes would be floating in the big river. With a bottle of Hudson's Bay rum tucked away under my mackinaw I left the saloon where for the first time I had ventured to consider such a poignant subject as my immediate future. Reality, with its material problems, was slowly penetrating my muddled mind. I could no longer say that I did

not care with zest and sincerity. On the whole I had formed certain ideas of this community and I knew that there existed even less sympathy and benevolence in circles where I moved than I was entitled to, which all meant that I should leave Dawson before it was too late to do it gracefully—or at all. A few light snowflakes were dancing down from the murky sky, and they made me wonder if I were going to find any coal or wood in my cabin. I had never been conscious of such matters during all this time, neglecting even the most important duties. I was simply unable to take care of myself and unfit to face anything of a practical nature. The artificial energy and stimulation in the liquor must have been consumed by the burning frenzy of my mind.

My cabin looked inhospitable, and there was a sickening stench of dirt and mold. Fortunately, I had paid the rent for another month, so I was assured of a place of refuge for that long. Food and fuel had not been bought, however, and I cursed my negligence when I now thought of it. Imagine my surprise when I opened the cupboard and found it filled with an assortment of canned goods ranging from milk and meat to choice varieties of Crosse & Blackwell fruits and jams. No doubt I had purchased it at some time or other, but my mind was blank and every effort to remember was fruitless. There was very little coal left. This did not worry me because the nights

were dark, and I knew of a convenient pile of worthless, if not ownerless, lumber in the immediate vicinity.

I was hungry. Of late, food seemed to have been almost completely displaced by liquor, and days went by without a single meal. Again I looked over my supply of food. Strange, indeed, that I had bought it. And I wished I had been as thoughtful about liquor, for it certainly would require several bottles to restore normalcy in the least painful manner. The very thought of what a sudden severance from whiskey might mean to a mind so sensitive even when normal made me cringe. Well, I had at least plenty of food. My favorite fruits were represented, and some brands brought reminiscences of long ago. It struck me that, besides myself, only my mother or Audrey could have selected this assortment.

With surprising vigor I tackled the task of putting the cabin in order and preparing a meal. A red-hot stove and a wide open window caused a complete change of air, and it soon felt warm and comfortable. Hot water poured over a generous portion of rum, a sprinkling of cinnamon and some sugar, and I had a drink to my liking—another one a bit stronger and I was ready for the first really enjoyable meal since my plunge into oblivion.

Time as a distinct element had been obliterated during this alcoholic revelry, and it had some of

the same beguiling aspects of unreality one experiences in the semiconsciousness of high fever. That scene of melodrama in Lousetown might have happened long ages ago, years ago! During this indefinite time, so crowded with impressions, I had changed for better or for worse—obviously for the latter, but in any event I had managed to put the distance of time between myself and a tragedy before it had crushed me. Audrey had, so to speak, pushed me over a precipice, and, dazed by the fall, I simply required some strong medicine to recover—something like the amber-colored fluid in the glass I now held raised between myself and the gently swaying candle flame with a flaunting gesture as I drank to myself with the crisp toast:

“*Skaal*, you damn fool!”

A gust of wind whined and whistled as it turned and twisted around my cabin. Occasionally, footsteps could be heard scurrying by on the board walk. Snowflakes came to rest on the windowpanes, but the glass was warm, and they melted quickly into tiny drops and wriggling streamlets of water, scintillating in the reflected light from the candle. Then lighter and more hesitant steps came within my range of hearing. Something beyond conscious reasoning suddenly caused tense attention. Somebody was just passing, but the faint shuffling sound died directly outside the door, and in another moment I saw this late pedestrian peer through the window. A pair of curious eyes

gleamed like points of flame and were gone in a flash. Just as I rose from my chair to investigate, a gloved hand rapped softly on the door.

"Come in!"

Perhaps it was the rum, perhaps just my expectant curiosity, but I thought that the knob turned too slowly, too cautiously, and my pulses throbbed in excitement as I watched the widening aperture of the door. It was Eve. She looked clumsy, almost comical, overdressed as she was in true native fashion. I helped her remove some of the most superfluous clothing and offered her a chair at the table.

"What in the name of the saints brought you here?" I asked none too courteously.

In reply, she gave me her usual puzzled smile. What large and languid eyes she had! They were red and moist as from crying, and the empty stare conveyed a peculiar expression of lament which intrigued me. Finally she said in a low, submissive tone of voice:

"Oh, Donn, don't you like to have Eve visit with you? I like you."

"That's fine, hm, yes," I faltered, already a bit disarmed, "but someone might come, and you know that lots of people like to make it unpleasant—jealousy under the cloak of righteousness—do you get me?"

"No, I don't, I . . . I . . ." she sobbed.

"Stop crying, Eve. My nerves are jumpy enough

without that. Here's a drink for you. Don't get scared if you feel the ground tremble. Some of my forefathers might turn in their graves—unless they have already grown tired of doing that."

The thoughts that came to me were not pleasant. So it had come to this, I reflected while watching her drink. Plying a mere child, and an Indian at that, with liquor! It is, indeed, easy to descend. And I knew a hard but just name for anyone who contributes to the delinquency of an Indian girl, applicable to me now, even if this namesake of mankind's first sinner had strayed from the primrose path long before meeting me.

Tears and smiles come easily to children of the wilderness, and they are happily irresponsible. I could pity Eve more than I could Audrey, because this little squaw was hardly capable of deliberate deceit. Only the most imperative and immediate problems concerned or interested her. Besides, she liked me, loved me.

"I come from Moosehide," she said, speaking eagerly but laboring for words. "Next full moon I must marry Jacques. His squaw died, and him good friend to father and chief. But I don't like him—I like you. You take Eve, and we go away to place I know. Lots of game and good cabin. I teach you how to trap and hunt as Indians do. You like me—you like little Eve, don't you?"

There was something difficult to resist in her emotional appeal, and I caught myself slipping.

Yes, I knew it would be temptingly easy to disappear, to bid a final goodbye and then go to seek oblivion as an aborigine; mine for the price of a white man's pride, for the price of everything which has made him rise. Oh, no! I could never descend to that, never surrender, not even for the prettiest Eve in Alaska. Both Audrey and Eve had played and finished their roles of tragedy and folly in my life.

Eve came and sat on my lap, drawing up her legs and snuggling closely to me. She whispered strange Indian words which nevertheless seemed to strike a responsive chord. The guttural sounds conveyed her love in a language I could understand even if I had never heard it before. There were dormant savagery and passion in the purring caress of her low, singsong voice, and I felt that I was looking into the soul of this love-enchanted squaw. I thought of a friend's remark:

"They can give you more in a night than a white woman in a whole year!" Fierce, raw, primitive love!

Despite my interest and surprise, I remained unusually impassive. Cosmetics and perfume were probably unknown perquisites of culture to Eve and there was entirely too much odor from her native home for unalloyed romance. Her coarse, black hair had a gloss like polished mahogany, but when she came real close I knew that this must have been accomplished with the aid of some

animal fat and rancid at that. Gently but firmly I carried her over to a chair and busied myself with the preparation of another drink.

"Look at this bottle, Eve," I said, raising it as if to toast my visitor. "It contains the same stuff which has sent so many braves of your race to meet the Great Spirit prematurely. Let us have another drink, and then we'll talk things over."

Her eyes which had the depth and color of night followed me with something of the unfathomable devotion and love a dog can express for its master. Since meeting Eve I had learned something new about the psychology of a social and moral problem. In fact, it surprised me more and more that so few become squawmen, even if I never came quite that close to forgetting myself.

A scene proved unavoidable no matter how gently I conveyed my refusal to let her stay. I tried to reason as I would with a child, but her emotions had been raised to a pitch not amenable to sense or logic. She cried, threatened, and raved on until exhausted. I was shocked at the coarse thoughts she expressed, and it startled me that such a youngster could harbor so much bitterness. But gradually she grew calm and docile. The reaction to my final refusal was so unexpected that I suspected her of deliberately having enacted this scene in an attempt to persuade me, thus proving that the ways of a maiden are of a rather universal nature. This time, however, the male of the species happened to be

rather inured to tears and threats, even if the margin of safety in his case should have been much, much wider.

"It is late, Eve, and you mustn't stay," I said firmly. "I'll see you again and we'll always be friends. Your father knows what is best for you, and I'm sure you wouldn't be happy away from your own folks. Now good night."

At this moment I caught a softer gleam in her eyes. I opened the door and looked out into a night now cold and clear after the season's first snow flurry. The blue-black sky was alive with stars. The moon gleamed like a huge silver sickle, and the cold, crisp air seemed to tremble with the soft murmur of distant rippling water. Fog was rising over the river, and a few clouds clung to the hill-tops in the east, while others drifted slowly down the valley. A spell stole over me while I stood in the doorway and watched a little heartbroken Indian girl walk out of my life into the eerie wonders of the moonlit night, out into a world that belonged to her and not to me. A tear, glistening like a diamond, rested on my finger after stroking Eve's wet cheek. And when I pressed her parting gift to my lips I felt better, felt more at peace, although a dull ache lingered on in my heart.

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ALL THE next day I was extremely nervous, worried and homesick in spite of the fact that I continued to consume liberal quantities of the remaining rum. Vainly I tried to write, but words and thoughts were evasive. Nothing seemed sufficient to describe the Inferno of recovering from this long spell of intoxication. Another long day crawled slowly away. I had no intentions whatever to repent at once in "sackcloth and ashes" but even a gradual reform was by no means a painless task. Sleep invariably meant going through the horrors of a nightmare and every moment of my wakeful hours had some form of mental or physical torture. When too much to endure I resorted to drinking but I was pleased to notice that gradually decreased portions were sufficient for the purpose. Long walks, vigorous exercise, and frequent baths accomplished a miracle of resurrection in less than a week. My skeptical companions were treated to a surprise and their attitude made it easier for me —they gave me something more tangible than merely a resolution to live up to.

One morning I happened to run into one of my old friends from Slate Creek. I had once had the opportunity to do him a good turn. After finding out that I was broke, he suggested we go to Fairbanks as partners. His funds were low, but enough remained to finance this trip. Eagerly I consented and we proceeded to buy the outfit. The Yukon River was still open. We planned to float down to Circle and then take the overland trail. One of the reasons for my decision to go was that Fairbanks was the most likely place to find Ed and the baron. I actually pined for my old and trusted friend Ed. His sarcasm would be like music to me now, and I would have given much just for another quarrel. His rude ways were, after all, only the deceptive aspect of the truest, most loyal heart ever given me in friendship. And the very presence of the jolly and loquacious baron should cure most of my mental ailments.

Judging by the interest my many acquaintances displayed in our trip, I must have been quite conspicuous, if not popular, in a wide circle of saloon habitués. This interest also meant more drinks than consistent with my original plans but without any serious or unpleasant consequences this time.

Early in the afternoon of the day we intended to make our last in Dawson it became necessary to put my inebriate partner to bed. Almost sober myself, despite the occasion, I decided to take just another walk in my old aimless manner. Thin

layers of frozen earth crumbled under my heavy shoes as I walked down the rough, uneven street from my cabin, and the ice on the little pools crashed like breaking glass. Once more I strayed down toward the Klondike River. Something urged me on, and when I stood on the same bridge I had once crossed to meet Audrey I could have knelt in prayer as a torrent of emotions carried me away. Completely unconscious of my surroundings and lashed into a fury by suddenly released memories, everything dormant and suppressed within me was suddenly fanned into a raging flame. Again I lived over every detail of that dreaded scene in Lousetown. When I finally came to I was leaning against the railing sobbing like a lost child. Then I thought that if Audrey had been here I could have forgiven her. In any event I was aware that much of my bitterness and hatred had left me during this fierce outburst, and I was also conscious of a returning tenderness.

"Where is Audrey?" I repeatedly questioned myself. That letter I had only partly read and then destroyed might have contained this information, although I had taken it for granted that she was still in Lousetown. But even if I still loved her I could also curse and hate the one who had killed my prettiest dream, my best and fondest hope, and had hurled me into a living hell.

Loved her? Why, I loved every component part of the loveliest and fairest that had ever come into

my life—loved her more than the life I could snuff out so easily, so quickly, right below where I stood —only a splash, a cry, and all would be over. "I shall rather die than give you up" read the words which had burnt themselves into my heart. Could one as low and deceptive as Audrey be capable of the sincerity expressed in that letter? A thousand voices seemed to shout "No!" Still that same question could have forced me down on my knees to pray for another answer. A party of miners were approaching from Lousetown. Quickly I turned homeward.

My new partner was preparing a meal when I returned. Evidently a few hours of sleep had restored control over his legs, although his mind remained in the same happy blur. He was quite excited over something which I guessed must have happened during my absence. When questioned, he deliberately tried to arouse my curiosity by subtle and incomplete references to the visit of a mysterious woman, stubbornly refusing to reveal anything definite until I was ready to box his ears.

"Don't get mad, Donn," he pleaded when aware of my rising temper. "I'll tell you all about her. The swellest looking dame I ever laid my eyes on called while you were out—she looked real ladylike too. Why the hell did you undress me? I had to talk to her lying in bed. She sure was curious about you. Asked where you was and where you was going and then she sat down there by the table

and wrote a note. Here it is. And, by the way, she didn't say a word when she left, but I noticed tears rolling down her cheeks. What have you done to her?"

"None of your damn business," I retorted hotly. "What did she look like?" I asked although I knew it was Audrey who had called.

"Oh, kind of dagolike: dark or brown eyes, big as saucers, and dark hair and dark complexion and sweet and innocent-looking. I'd take her to be around sixteen or so, and she'd reach just about to my shoulder or possibly a wee bit higher...."

Avoiding my companion's curious eyes, I walked over to the cupboard and poured myself a drink. This I did more mechanically than intentionally for I was lost in a chaos of thoughts. Disconnected pictures from memory-haunted days raced before my eyes, and I felt as though I were standing by the Vista House re-creating another emotional scene with the same frenzy, same uncontrollable passion. With the suddenness of a shock I realized that Audrey had again entered my life and that all my efforts to sever the ties once and for all with the climax in Lousetown had been in vain. This was the first time I wanted to see her and I bitterly regretted my absence from the cabin even if I would not yet lift a finger to find her—it was up to her now—despite a sudden hunger for her face, the caress of her fingers, the feel of her lips on mine.

"I told her we'd be leaving for Fairbanks in the

morning," Scotty jabbered on, grinning in a way that maddened me.

"Shut up! Guess I'll go out for a while. You stay here."

When outside I read the letter. Audrey begged and promised with the same infinitely touching pathos and incomparable sincerity she could express so well. The old, forceful arguments I had once used, first for my interest in Audrey and then for my infatuation, came back with irrefutable strength. Thoughts clashed as I read on: "Wonder how many fell for her while she was in that hellhole across the river?"

"I am working for a family who has befriended me," informed the letter. No matter how hard I fought, the most irrelevant and hateful thoughts persisted in adding to the agony. It seemed useless to reason with myself. Nervous, distracted, and disgusted with the whole mess, I decided to resort once more to the temporary relief of a few drinks. Just as I entered the Yukon Saloon I met the superintendent of the mine where I had worked. First I thought he was going to kiss and embrace me in true Latin manner. I had never suspected that this phlegmatic Englishman could have thought as much of me as his greeting and elated actions indicated. He was simply overjoyed and frankly told me so.

"What's wrong with you, Donn?" he asked.

"You've changed since I saw you last—have you been ill?"

"In a way, yes. I've been on a drunk for the last two or three weeks. Just sobering up now."

"Didn't expect that of you, but that's nothing. Got a job?"

"No, Mr. Stafford," I replied, "I haven't. I'm jobless, penniless, and friendless."

"Friendless!" he exclaimed. "Not as long as I'm around, Donn. Any plans for the future?"

Placing his hands on my shoulders he looked me squarely in the eyes. His told me that I had one real friend.

"I intend to leave for Fairbanks tomorrow," I informed him. "Scotty, who worked on the night shift, is going, and he offered to stake me. It's about time that I move, anyway."

"With Scotty, you say. Hm, you'd better not. He isn't your kind, Donn. Better come with me. I'm leaving in the morning for Slate Creek, and you can have that job I once promised you."

I asked for time to consider, but my friend was insistent, and I accepted.

My heart was full, but I felt light as if walking on air when I returned to the cabin after having had dinner with my old boss. When we parted he gave me twenty dollars stating that the money was an advance from the company and that my name would be placed on the payroll the following day.

Scotty accepted my change of mind so gracefully that I suspected him of being pleased.

Somehow just the mere fact that a prayer, a simple but earnest expression of gratitude to the Author of all Things, came over my lips before I fell asleep, convinced me that there was still hope for a truant who had strayed so far from the straight and narrow path.

IT FELT good to be back among friends, better still to be at work and to be hungry, tired, and at peace with one's soul. My work was no sinecure but I did not mind that so much because it took me away from myself during a time when it might have been dangerous to brood. At nights fatigue was like a soothing drug in my blood and it mellowed my mind as only music could have done. Gradually I became more susceptible to emotions and page upon page in my diary received sketches and poems which I did not have the heart to tear out even if I resented many discouraging evidences of a groping and uncontrolled mind. Among the most rhapsodic outpourings were the letters I wrote but never mailed to Audrey. She had not given me her address in the last note, but I took it for granted that Dawson, General Delivery, would reach her. Finally I mailed her a letter in which I indicated my willingness to correspond. When it was returned with the word "Unknown" stamped several times over her name I was deeply

disappointed. Soiled and torn, the envelope looked as if intentionally mutilated and it conveyed a grim message which my heart seemed to interpret as telling that I had lost Audrey. A sorrow transcending reason, pride, and bitterness now entered a door I once thought had been closed forever.

"Suppose that Audrey had been sincere in her vows to love and had honestly tried to win me back? Suppose also that she had gone through ordeals after I left Atlin which would have made anybody fall; if so, have I done the right thing by her?"

"Last night I was invited by the superintendent for dinner and a game of bridge—strange game in a poker country, but bridge we played. The power-plant manager sat in for a while and he saw to it that the drinks were generous and frequent. A story around the camp has it that this tall, broad-shouldered American engineer has not known a sober moment for years. His wife deserted him while he was in South America on a construction job similar to the one here. He broke down, and his friends feared for his mind, but liquor came to the rescue and restored him to artificial normalcy. One can readily see that he is a marked and perhaps even a doomed man, although it certainly does not detract any from the interest and respect he commands as a distinguished engineer and cultured

gentleman. The faraway, almost void look in his eyes and a peculiar whimsical smile around an extremely sensitive mouth seem incongruous. Who knows but that he is as happy and contented as anyone can be, even if Nature might eventually exact a heavy toll for traveling on the road he has chosen.

"At first he treated me as if I were nonexistent, but after correcting a statement pertaining to a very involved and controversial scientific subject, my humble presence was discovered. After that we undoubtedly bored the party with our academic discussion, but before retiring I knew I had gained the friendship of a truly interesting man."

"The management has decided to sink a shaft to tap a layer of higher grade coal. I am assigned to the day shift as "rope-rider," which means a steady job for the winter—unless something happens. Fixed up my bunk last week and added a folding table so I can write and read more comfortably. It is getting cold and the wind has the chill of death in it—huh!"

"The boys occasionally comment on the fact that I associate so much with the bosses. Only Ryan is really sarcastic, which, of course, is to be expected. He hates everybody, including himself. Stafford told me Ryan is the best miner in the camp, so that offsets any and all shortcomings.

He has a most annoying habit of lifting his lips in a snarl, and his eyes always have a hard glint of contempt. I feel extremely uncomfortable in his presence and there is no doubt that he hates me. A trivial occurrence in the mine was the beginning of open animosity and it has now grown into something which might result in a fight. Should I confide in Stafford?"

"If I were asked to state my conception of happiness, I would answer without hesitation and without any qualifications: *Tranquillity of mind with unimpaired faculties.* But shall it ever be mine?"

"The snow blanket is growing thicker—I suppose even the ground needs plenty of bedding these days, for it is bitterly cold. Moose meat is now on the table every day. A tall, reserved Scandinavian is the official hunter. He came about a week ago and is already one of the most respected men in the camp. I have tried to get acquainted with him, but even my sincere interest in his guns and binoculars failed to penetrate his armor of reserve. I am told that many large camps employ professional hunters to provide game. The hunting is done in a highly efficient and, one may say, modern manner. Certain vantage points are picked out among the hills, and from there the hunter carefully scans the country with the aid of strong binoculars.

When a moose is spotted he advances within range of his high-power gun and invariably slays it from an incredible distance.”

“Wrote Maclaren today. Received a letter from him a week ago. He and Sinclair plan to go outside for the winter. Probably California. Will return to Alaska in the spring, and my friend hopes to join me then. Friendship is truly wonderful. It is the setting for some of my best memories, and I am richer and better and kinder because of men like Ed, Maclaren, and Sinclair. Maybe a little less of love and a little more of respect and friendship and an affair of the heart might not have developed into so much melodrama.”

“Ordered a bottle of Hudson’s Bay rum from the mail carrier, and he brought it today. Treated the boys before leaving for the mine. More than half of the rum remained, but when we returned to the cabin, all eager for a drink after a hard day, there was only an empty bottle standing on the same shelf where it had been left. I have good reasons to suspect Ryan. This sullen Irishman is certainly no prototype of his splendid race.”

“Of late I have given my behavior in Dawson more consideration, and the result of this self-criticism is not at all pleasant. I acted like an insufferable cad, like a fool, even if my motive justi-

fied an upheaval. I had owed Audrey a chance to explain her actions, no matter how I felt. Besides, there is never sufficient cause for a gentleman to forget himself as I did."

"I have known melancholy as an inheritance, sadness as the color of my memories, and now I know sorrow. Some of the boys laugh at my silence —Ryan sneers. '*Evigt eies kun det tabte*' wrote Ibsen. There seems to be so much profound meaning therein that it becomes meaningless. 'Audrey gone, perhaps even lost, now eternally mine,' is a persistent parallel thought. Bewildered, helpless, in a confusion—wish I had some good books."

"Tragedy stalked a human prey last night. Scotty Moore's cabin burned down, and his squaw perished. He was away playing poker in the mess house, and his squaw was drunk as usual. The children all escaped. The big, bloated squaw was one of the most sordid sights of womanhood I have ever seen, also the only one of her sex in the camp. Scotty has gone native and returns to the mines only once a year to make a grubstake. The children are said to be syphilitic, and rumors have it that even if a dozen are living, there is at least another dozen buried in the native cemetery in Fortymile. The camp is strangely hushed today."

"We must be close to Aurora Borealis, near to the very source of that incomparable phenomenon of the North. Especially when the weather is about to change we are sure to behold the glory of a spectacle that never tires one, never fails to impress. Last night it was so grand that it actually struck terror in my heart. This morning it was much warmer, and enough snow has fallen to make a hunter's heart leap in anticipation. Stafford sent word yesterday that I was to accompany him on a survey of the timber across the low saddle ridge above the mine. The plant superintendent was the third member of the party which left before day-break, and we had covered a steep mile or more when it was full daylight. We then stopped for a bite to eat. While we were eating and resting I saw the impressive silhouette of a giant moose just as he crossed a high divide directly above us. We scrambled to our feet in a mad rush and ran as fast as snowshoes will permit, trying to follow his tracks. To our dismay we found that he had disappeared toward the impregnable wilderness of Bear Creek, and it was useless to attempt trailing him across the steep canyon which separated us. We were more than compensated, however, by a splendid view of a region known to be very inaccessible and also a real big game paradise. It was like looking into a mysterious *terra incognita*. Our learned friend, the engineer, ventured the opinion that a different geological formation accounted for

the weird, forbidding contours of crags, cliffs, and canyons. There was enough bare rock exposed on the hillsides to give us an idea of the marvelous color effect it must present in summertime. Isolated groves of small, cone-shaped spruce trees with long and snow-heavy branches looked like family gatherings and a few poplars and birch trees in sheltered places added a touch of gentle grace to the stern scenery. We saw many tracks, especially on the ridges, but there was no game in sight, and we were only practicing when our guns shattered the silence of this serene wilderness.

"Leaving the headwaters of Bear Creek, which shares the same watershed with Slate Creek, we climbed over the divide, making a wide circle, but hoping to return before dark. We had not yet reached the summit when a few strong stars pierced the northern hemisphere. Then we saw with unexpected suddenness the spears and streamers of northern lights seemingly only a few hundred yards away. Ridge upon ridge formed the horizon as we climbed on, and one could easily fancy that the gleaming javelins and swords against the grey-blue sky were those of an army of Arctic trolls. It came nearer and nearer, and even my rather imperturbable friends expressed their amazement as spontaneously as I did. We all stopped at the same instant when a sharp, crackling sound like the firing of distant machine guns, followed by a peculiar swishing noise, broke the silence and we

looked at each other with awe and wonder in our startled eyes. It lasted only a few moments but it gave us a memory for life. Next time I read that such things do not occur in connection with Aurora Borealis I shall smile because there are three of us who know better."

"This morning when I asked Stafford if he had compiled his findings on the supply of mining props, he replied with a sly twinkle in his calm eyes: 'Ostensibly, yes; actually, no.' He is a man to my liking."

"Christmas is over. I have lived far away during this feast of such deep sentiment and profound meaning.

"Our taciturn hunter has visitors today. His young squaw with a lively, babbling papoose on her back came a while ago after having munched through a raging snowstorm. There is that same inner expression of happiness and peace in their eyes which I have seen once before. I think I can understand their alien silence, their unaffected, stoical reserve. We have left the family a corner of our cabin to themselves, but it is late and we are beginning to wonder where they are going to stay over night. Surely they do not figure on leaving this late even if the weather has improved.

"Now it is clear to me why he is such a silent

man; he is going native. Perhaps he is already a white aborigine. If all could do it as decently as this squawman, then there would be no race problem in Alaska. I thought of the extreme contrast Scotty represented. And I also wonder what might have happened to me and Eve. When I look at the trio in the corner, it is as though someone whispers in my ears: 'There, but for the grace of God, goes you, yourself!' Still, would it have mattered if I had found happiness?"

"Every time I see the unclouded grandeur of a new, full moon, a little, brown-skinned Indian maiden comes visiting my mind like a friendly apparition out of a dead past. There is something about the moon which seems akin to the cold, abstruse aspect of Eve's own soul. And as her gift of love to me I am often conscious of a strange kinship with nature, beyond my understanding now, but I hope that some day there will come into my eyes that same glint of inscrutable wisdom or pagan knowledge I have seen in the placid, inward stare of a little squaw who liked me only too well."

ONE bleak day somewhere in between winter and spring, the mine superintendent informed us that the stockholders of the Imperial Mining Company, Ltd. had voiced indignation and disapproval at the annual meeting in London, England, and that as a result orders had now come over the wires to stop all work on Slate Creek. We were surprised, to be sure, but what a tale any of us could have told the investors back in England! The rusting machinery, much of it still in the original crates and left where unloaded; the partly finished jobs; the pathetic futility evidenced in the stupendous efforts to harness nature's dormant power—all these things, however, were really not altogether representative of waste or inefficiency, only proof of man's dare and folly and greed. Two million dollars just to find out that it couldn't be done was a great deal of money, but I was iconoclast enough to feel more concerned about all those who had labored so long and so well even if in vain. A few had given their lives, many more had been maimed, and I think that every man had given a bit more than paid for.

I felt no concern when so suddenly severed from the payroll. Spring was in the offing, and my savings should last quite a while even in Dawson. A feeling almost like apathy had been creeping into my torn mind since Christmas, an extreme reaction after another leap into an Inferno of self-reproach and longing. Only a few officials and watchmen remained at Slate Creek. Stafford bid me goodbye and Godspeed with moist eyes. How I hated to part from this splendid emissary of a land justly proud of its distinguished sons. A few more like him and ours would be a better world to live in.

To the surprise and disappointment of my companions I refused to join them while in Forty Mile and I stayed only long enough to buy an outfit as nearly complete as I could afford. With the assistance of an old half-breed I freighted it across the Yukon and down to the mouth of Slate Creek. There I took possession of the cabin which had once caught my fancy and which now more than anything else had caused me to change my mind about going to Dawson until after the break-up of the river. Inquiries in Fortymile had revealed that my new home belonged to nobody in particular and anybody in general. The mounted police sergeant told me he was glad that somebody intended to occupy the cabin and keep it in good repair. My decision to seek solitude was not entirely motivated by depleted funds. I was bored, tired and un-

balanced and needed privacy, rest, and quietness to find my own self.

No one shall ever know how deadly earnest I was in everything during these days, how supremely important was only a soothing thought, only a pleasant dream and only a hope strong enough to last even for just a few precious moments.

I sent the half-breed back to Fortymile for another load of supplies, and when he returned I engaged him for a few days to help with the wood. His company was not appreciated, but he taught me a lot about trapping and hunting which was worth more than all the inconveniences or the few dollars I paid him. The door and the windows were in need of repair; snow had drifted in through cracks, and squirrels or rats had helped to mess up the otherwise comfortable and well-built log cabin. I kept my assistant busy getting firewood, a task I never liked, while I did my best to fix up the new home. A snowstorm kept us confined indoors for several days and when it stopped I bid goodbye to my odorous and unsociable but willing servant. I was now alone in the best meaning of the word.

While at Slate Creek I had bought a good rifle. I was soon conscious of a strong attachment to a weapon which means so much to one in Alaska. When outdoors it was always in my hand or slung over my shoulder and it seemed my best assurance of safety; in fact, it was something like the companionship of a friend. Only one who has known

complete isolation and solitude can realize how much sentiment may be attached even to inert and purely material objects. An old prospector told me that furniture, such as tables, chairs, and stoves, can become living things to hermits, endowed by their hungry minds with characteristics of different personalities, thus taking the place of companions. Before long I found out how unbelievably real were my own flights of fancy. One evening I caught myself talking to an imaginary visitor, and a gasp of astonishment escaped me when its incredible realism almost took the place of what could have happened. Yes, this smiling, brown-eyed genie standing in the doorway could have been Audrey.

Winter continued to reign. The sun was still powerless although the days were much longer. One morning a warm south wind howled lustily as it traveled down the river. It did not last long enough to have any appreciative effect on the snow and ice, but the sweet scent of spring it had carried stayed in the air.

Rabbits were plentiful, and only a few wire snares supplied me with all the meat I wanted. One day I shot a red fox, but the fur was of poor quality, and my inexperience at skinning made it worse. A mink shared the same fate, and its fur certainly did not improve any under my unskilled treatment. My daily wanderings became more extensive, and I began to feel a deep love for this wondrous country. There was always a thrill to

find something different, to discover a new creek, a promising quartz formation and to dream that they might contain stores of hidden wealth. One night I heard a crashing noise outside the cabin. Grabbing my gun I rushed out, but I was too late for a shot at a moose quickly disappearing in the thicket on a low ridge.

Without any intentional effort I soon settled down to a regular routine of living. In the mornings I devoted considerable time to cooking and washing while I also planned the day's hunting or prospecting trip. After returning late in the afternoon my hunger was the paramount issue, and after a long and hearty meal I settled down to read or write. Dreams, as well as all the moods which shape and color my life, were my guests, and I made many memories of incomparable tints and depths out of this voluntary escape from noise and chatter. The *Golden Book* of Marcus Aurelius, didactic and affected but enchanting with its background of Roman culture; Fröding's *Poems*, profound and by far the most touching *documents humains* I have ever read; a battered copy of Shakespeare's complete works; the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam and several books by Jack London and Kipling were my faithful friends. I had always considered myself unequal to the task of again reading all of Shakespeare's works but I was surprised how easily and pleasantly this was accomplished after a little effort had removed the imaginary barriers. Less

regularly than reading were my attempts at writing. Still only a few weeks caused more than a hundred pages to be added to my collection of sense and nonsense.

But Audrey—I shall never recall one fleeting moment of this adventure in solitude without thinking of her, without wondering how I can find words for anything but her. Nearer and nearer as I rediscovered my own heart came the vision of the girl I loved. My bitterness and contempt were drowned in a flood of tenderness I had never imagined could be experienced in such fullness. That she was gone, maybe forever, was my penalty, but the torture of realizing my mistakes was alleviated by an infinitely more sincere acceptance of the true nature of our infatuation. She had forgiven me, she once wrote, and I could now take it as a matter of fact that she had, because Audrey understood, had always understood with a dearly bought wisdom, far surpassing what knowledge I had acquired.

But even the fairest and gentlest of dreams exact their toll, and there were times when I rushed out of the cabin to escape the torture of my outbursts. Like a pagan of old I sought refuge with nature. I have never wondered why man has made himself a God out of that great, all-encompassing, all-transcending Spirit of the wilderness which is so near our souls. Is there really any necessity to worship God in temples when the best place to find

Him and to feel Him very near is out in the unsheltered open? It must have been a strange sight in the half-light of stars and of a narrow, crescent-shaped moon to have seen me one night, bare-headed, wild-eyed, and flushed with a hectic fever, standing in a trance on the high snow-covered bank of the Yukon River, unmindful of everything around me, although soon finding some of the calm and silence and peace which compose the very soul of this great country.

During these lazy days of solitude I must have eaten enough sourdough hotcakes to qualify as a "sourdough" even without having seen the ice come and go in the Yukon. It would not be long now before that great event of the North when the river breaks its shackles. The fantastic upheaval of ice cakes around the bend below my cabin had melted away into a mere miniature of its former grandeur and chaos, and one warm day I counted six large spots of bare ground on the bank across the river. The sap was running in the birch trees. I made incisions in the bark, hoping to tap the sweet juice as we did when we were young boys, but it did not seem to taste as good here. The poplar buds were oily and fragrant, and once I found tiny sprouts on a bush which still had its feet in snow and frozen soil. After another warm spell it was impossible to cross the river, and I was now completely isolated. To my disappointment I missed seeing the ice break, although the grinding and

crashing of the flow kept me awake with its ominous roar one long night of unconquerable nervousness. When morning came I looked out upon an unforgettable sight of change and realized with a flutter of my heart that I was no longer a cheechaco. The still sluggish and sleepy-looking river seemed like a new friend, and I knew that before long I would be floating on that long trail of water in search of Audrey.

Somehow it had never occurred to me to see if my old boat still remained where I had left it in the fall. Contrary to expectation I found it in the same spot but with one side badly crushed by the ice. Carpentry was the trade my father once pronounced me as absolutely unfit to learn, but this was one time when I would have surprised anybody. I actually fixed up my boat with the crudest of tools and I was well pleased with the finished job. Besides reconditioning it thoroughly, I equipped it with a mast and improved the seats. By the time I had made a crude square sail from a piece of old canvas I had enough confidence in my improved craft to cross an ocean, providing, of course, it never stormed.

More eager and expectant, I found the days longer, and the laggard stride of time began to prey on my mind. Prospecting proved difficult, and hunting would be poor until ducks and geese had arrived. There was a small lake only a few hundred feet from my cabin. It teemed with

muskrats, and long before all the ice was gone flocks of migratory birds circled and lighted on its ever placid surface. Geese were flying in long chains, ducks were gliding by in disorderly flocks, and now and then a few swans winged northward—all like waves of life between earth and sky. My gun was not suitable for light game, but I managed to kill several geese, and it was the arrogant estimation of him who ate the fowls that no cook could have done better. There was still a great deal of ice on the river when I heard the chugging of a motorboat. On its way back it stopped at my place, and I learned that the owner was the mail carrier. He had put in on account of motor troubles. Hungry for company, I persuaded him to remain for dinner. My hospitality must have been appreciated, because he suggested that I accompany him on a trip to Dawson next week. A white flag on the fist-shaped bluff projecting into the river below the creek was to be the signal in case I decided to accept his generous offer.

He was hardly out of sight before I cut a long pole to which I attached an old dish-towel for the want of a better flag. I had a little over twenty dollars left and could not afford a pleasure trip, but Dawson was the only place where I might get any information about Audrey, and there should also be considerable mail for me. After caching most of my supplies in a safe place, I hid the boat carefully under a cover of brush and spruce

boughs. What could conveniently be taken along was packed into my bundle. Everything was ready several days before the expected arrival of the mail boat. And when it finally appeared around the turn I was standing on the bank, ready and eager for a trip I hoped would mean everything to the fate of two enamored roammers of the North.

We arrived in Dawson the same day as the first steamer from Whitehorse and nearly seven months since meeting Audrey in Lousetown.

UNLESS something occurred to cause a change of mind, I intended to return to Slate Creek and prepare for a trip down the Yukon River. This, of course, all depended upon what I might learn about Audrey's whereabouts. Something told me that she must have gone to the lower country or to Fairbanks in her search for me. The mailman was busy with his own affairs, leaving me to shift for myself. All eagerness and suspense, I left the boat and hurried along familiar streets to the post office. Having neglected to leave a forwarding address when the camp shut down, I feared the worst.

"We were just going to return your mail," said the clerk when he handed me a pack of letters, and I thanked both him and my lucky star that it had not happened. Nearly a dozen letters were from home, two from Maclaren, one from Ed, but nothing from Audrey. Something whirled around in my head, and I felt dizzy and bewildered. In the emptiness of my mind there was only the desire to be alone. Anyone meeting me while I

rushed over to a secluded place near the docks must have considered me a bit worse off for liquor, but I was helpless against this tide of emotions—too much suspense and hope and longing pent up in me. Changing my mind, I turned and walked back to a saloon where a couple of drinks quickly restored my grip on the unruly nerves. Retiring to a corner of the large saloon, I began to read my mail. Letters from home told of a normal course of events except that Mother expressed more than her usual anxiety and longing; my friends chatted lightly and leisurely—all was well. Maclaren wrote that he and Sinclair expected to arrive in Dawson as soon as possible after the break-up.

Ed's letter was postmarked in Fairbanks. Even before beginning to read it I noticed the name Audrey as if embellished on one of the pages.

"Audrey is here in Fairbanks and still looking for you. She sure turned out to be a swell girl. Why don't you make up with her? She asked me to write you and tell you that she is waiting. And that is her job too because she is a waitress in a restaurant. You take my advice and write her a nice letter. Rialto Restaurant will reach her."

It was hours before I could read the rest of Ed's long and rambling letter. Financial reverses, caused by too much booze, the baron's natural aversion to labor, and numerous other factors, had reduced my partners from prospectors to common day laborers. Audrey had been the source of many "handouts,"

and her unstinted generosity was praised in glowing terms. "I don't see how she could fall for you," was the new and reversed opinion of my old partner. After cursing the country in general and Fairbanks in particular, Ed ended the long letter by stating that they were returning to Dawson as soon as the overland trail was in shape for mushing. If still there I could expect them about the time when the first boat from Whitehorse arrives. Audrey had told them that I had left for Fairbanks last fall, but I had not been seen there. They all hoped, however, that the letter would reach me and that I was alive and sober and, for their sake, also prosperous.

After returning to the boat I wrote Audrey and asked her forgiveness, humbly promising to bury the past. In order to convey a more realistic impression of my change of heart I enclosed several unfinished letters and other writings bearing on our stormy love affair. I summarized all important happenings since we parted, and when my long confession was sealed and mailed I felt that I had atoned a wrong.

In the evening I decided to visit some of my old haunts. Several of the gang, including Doane and Jim, greeted me with a sort of expectant hilarity when I entered the Alexandria Saloon. They looked hungry and thirsty. A white lie that I was broke suddenly caused a very different attitude toward me. When asked for the money he owed me,

Doane gave me a hard look out of his cold eyes. While talking to him, someone walked up unobserved from behind and slapped my shoulder. Startled, I wheeled around and saw the jovially grinning face of the baron. I really wanted to put my arms around him but we stood for several moments like two clumsy men who neither could nor dared to show or express their delight of meeting each other.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "you are looking fine, Donn. We've sure been missing you."

"Same here, baron. Where's Ed?"

"Oh, he's sticking around somewhere," he answered hesitatingly. "To tell the truth, I think he's out prospecting for drinks or for somebody to stake us to a meal—we're broke, you see. Same old story. We're getting along, though, but lately the meals come more irregularly than the drinks, it seems."

"Well baron, you and Ed aren't exactly broke any more, but all I've got is twenty bucks and an outfit. Let's have a drink before we start looking for Ed."

I had forgotten all about Doane and his friends for the moment. Now I noticed a sheepish grin on my debtor's face and I knew he must have regretted appraising my financial status wrongly. Twenty dollars can be a fortune even in Dawson, and the baron, who had seen thousands slip through

his fingers, acted as if he wanted to see my money before he could believe that my statement was true.

My friend talked and talked, but my interest was only feigned. All this time the baron meant more to me as a possible source of information about Audrey than as a friend and partner. I was afraid to question him, but finally I did, and he must have noticed a telltale tremor in my voice.

"How's the girl we used to know in Atlin—I mean Audrey?"

He looked startled as he answered with unexpected eagerness:

"Oh! say, Donn, that's right, I clean forgot to tell you. You know we met her in Fairbanks. Ed was pretty thick with her, but she had no use for anybody. All she could ever talk about was you. And can you believe it, she has gone straight, and one couldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole. I think Ed has some message from her. She made us both promise to look for you."

"Was she still in Fairbanks when you left?" I heard myself ask with a faltering voice while my mind was far, far away.

"No," he replied, "she went down the Tanana River before the ice broke. Told Ed she might return to Dawson if we located you here. That girl sure got a case on you, Donn. You ought to have seen how they swarmed around her in the cafe where she worked, but all one could get out of her was 'No!' "

Ed entered while we were still standing at the bar. Of all the men who have come into my life only Ed ever occupied a niche in my heart with such unquestionable right, despite the constantly reigning conflict of tastes, habits, and opinions. We were extreme contrasts, hence always quarrelling, but we needed each other, and a truly wonderful mutual trust held us firmly together as friends and partners. Ed's powerful physique, as well as his unconcerned and almost insolent manners, emanated an unshakable self-assurance which was the most striking characteristic of his incomplex personality.

Ed sauntered up to us with a peculiar swaggering roll of his broad shoulders. I hid behind the baron, and Ed's elbows were already on the bar before he noticed me. A gasp of astonishment escaped him when our eyes met, and then something similar to my meeting with the baron was enacted. The spell was broken first when I felt the strong, possessive clasp of his strong hands. Ed was quite intoxicated, as I had noticed from his manner of walking, but this insignificant fact did not detract anything from the unalloyed pleasure of meeting. When he told me in his blunt and coarse way that he had missed me, a responsive feeling welled up in my heart, and I felt teardrops grow uncomfortably large in my eyes.

"So have I, old top. Guess we better stick together from now on. Let's shake on that!"

"Yes, and drink too—aren't you treating, Donn?"

"Yes, you old booze-hound," I said with mild reproach, "but this will be the last drink for tonight—you've had plenty enough."

My inebriate partner was quite noisy and refused to be silenced, but even if the bartender and several strangers were attentive listeners I could forgive him because of his unrestrained frankness. When he finally came to the one topic which meant so much to me, then the tension of all that had been pent up so long became almost unendurable.

Cautiously I had led him up to the subject of Audrey and after he had started I was just as unconscious of the crowd as the narrator, who chattered away with unchallenged freedom.

"Yes, Donn, I sure didn't know what a swell little dame you had up in Atlin. I thought she was a fake like all the rest of the skirts I know, but she sure is one who fooled us all. Straight? Why she is so damn straight it gives me a pain to think about it. Wouldn't let me touch her—can you feature that? I don't care how you feel about it, but I fell for Audrey same as everybody else up in Fairbanks. You were a damn fool for turning her down. Remember you ain't no angel yourself, Donn. I'm beginning to think she's too good for you or for any of us, for that matter. Come on now, and let's have another drink! No, you say?

Well, you're the boss. I tried to kiss Audrey one night when she let me take her to a show. What do you think she did? She boxed my ears and then broke down and cried. Guess I was wrong, but, gee, I didn't know she'd take it that way. And what do you think she said? She said: 'I belong to only one man, and you ought to know who he is!' Guess she meant you, Kid! She couldn't talk about you without crying, honest she couldn't. Donn. What in hell did you do to her? She wouldn't tell me. Only that you were right, and she was wrong and deserved it all. Did the baron tell you how she helped us out? She sure was a regular pal. She's in a camp on lower Tanana now where she grub-staked somebody expecting to strike it rich. Oh, just another little drink, Donn? All right, you damn tightwad. Ain't got religion, have you?"

And so on farther and farther into the absurd until at last we left the Alexandria Bar. The baron listened with interest, and I was spellbound for reasons sufficient unto myself. No one could have made a more profound impression on me than Ed despite his condition, for I knew that, drunk or sober, he would always tell the truth. During the long hike to their cabin, I really felt mean and ungrateful because I longed to be alone with the happiness which had come to me while listening to Ed. But he needed me now and as his partner I had certain duties. Providence alone may be able to protect drunkards as well as children, but I have

noticed that a friend or a companion can also render necessary service on such a normal and common occasion as this one was. The baron and I did our best by friend Ed, and it was a relief when he at last submitted to being undressed. Hours passed, however, before my own dreams and memories vanished in the forgetfulness of sleep.

IT WAS more obvious in daylight why my partners occupied a cabin for which rent was neither asked nor offered. However, it provided privacy and shelter under a somewhat leaky roof, which was all that any penniless vagabond could expect for nothing. Both Ed and the baron brightened up perceptibly when I told of my outfit below Fortymile. I offered it and all my cash as joint property of the partnership, casting my vote for a trip down the Yukon and with Koyukuk as our ultimate destination. Ed, heavy-eyed and unusually silent this morning, approved of my suggestion. The baron was more reluctant, although he admitted that Dawson certainly did not offer many opportunities. Finally he gave in to our arguments and it was left to me to arrange for transportation to Fortymile on the mail boat. If this could be accomplished without paying any fare, then our trip was assured of at least a good start. It was like "going to Canossa" to ask for this, but of late my pride had learned to surrender and I promised to do my best with the mailman.

Before leaving, Ed handed me a note from Audrey. When I put it in my pocket without opening it and without a word of comment or thanks, Ed looked puzzled and he shook his head. He could not know that I was afraid to read it in his presence, afraid of ridicule, afraid of myself. My hand closed so tightly over the little envelope that I crushed it as one does a piece of paper about to be discarded, yet this convulsive grip seemed my hold on the very meaning of life, and in this note I expected to read a decree of destiny. When alone I slit it open with trembling fingers. Audrey's message was eloquently brief. All was well, she wrote. The world was dealing kindly with her. With simple, tender words she hoped and wished that I was enjoying all the good things in life. Then, abruptly and with impulsive force, she begged of me to forgive her, pleaded for a meeting any place, any time, and to wire her at once. It had never been the habit of my pagan fiancée to use the name of God even as an oath, and that fact alone made the closing sentence: "God bless you, Donn!" seem infinitely more touching. Puzzled but pleased, I repeated it several times—Audrey must have changed!

After finding out that a telegram to Fairbanks was within my means, I cabled her: "Will meet you Fort Yukon in two weeks. Love." Including my name that passed for ten words. Afterward it seemed that I could have worded it much better

or still better sent a deferred message with more words for the same cost. I told my partners about the cable but refused to divulge its contents.

"Sure, Donn, if they are friends of yours they can come along," said the mailman, thus again proving that there is a lot of kindness even in such a selfish country as Alaska. We invested about half of our money in flour, spices, and ammunition to complement my own outfit. My partners had been drinking heavily for several days, and it would have been unkind of me to deny them a chance to sober up gradually. Before buying a gallon of cheap but potent whiskey I made them promise to cut out drinking in the saloons. The result was that we had a much better time together, besides leaving a five-dollar bill still intact when two days later we boarded the boat.

Ed voluntarily talked about Audrey so often that it was plain she had made a deep impression on him. Even if much was reiterated I did not inform him that the subject had been rather thoroughly covered, in fact nearly exhausted the first evening. I did not dare to show too much interest for fear of his sarcasm, but the baron soon commented that it appeared to him as if we were all in love with this fascinating belle of the North. Ed looked and I felt guilty. When again back to the beloved subject, Ed told us that one day Audrey had asked him for advice on finding me. She had written to Dawson, but the letter had been re-

turned undelivered and she was now planning to send cards addressed to every post office in Alaska and Yukon, hoping to reach me in that rather unusual manner. My friend did not know what to tell her. As callous as he was, he admitted being deeply moved by her devotion and loyalty.

"Didn't think there was a girl that would do that much for any guy," was his comment.

We found that bears had been trying to get into my cache at Slate Creek, and nothing short of a miracle, probably in the form of a timely interruption, could have saved my provisions. The baron grew eloquent on the subject of how careless and ignorant a "cheechako" can be, and I am sure we all shivered a bit at the thought of the consequences had the bruins been successful in their raid.

Maclaren had asked us to write him, care of General Delivery in Dawson. This we did, giving him a detailed statement of our itinerary. We found it necessary to spend a couple of days making a few improvements on our boat before starting on the long trip. In the morning of the same day we intended to leave, our friends from Atlin landed, firing and shouting like savages on the warpath. We staged a reception with such abandon and spontaneity that I am sure only Indians or children could have outdone us. A carefully concealed bottle of rum was brought out to add to the zest of our feast of reunion. Only a flutter of

anxiety in my own expectant heart over the realization that another day's delay might mean something more serious than mere loss of time disturbed me when on the next sun-kissed morning we left the lonely spot of rest and beauty where I had spent so many unforgettable days.

Before reaching Eagle and the International Boundary we stopped and camped on a sand bar not directly connected with the river bank. Experience had taught us that in such places one encountered only the advance guards of the blood-thirsty army of mosquitoes which always lurked along the banks. Unfortunately our new companions were also in reduced circumstances, and another division of my outfit did not improve the outlook even if we had unshaken confidence in the hospitality of the river. Hunting and fishing required considerable time every day, consequently we made only slow progress and after the first two or three days I figured out that even with the best of luck we would be nearly a week late arriving in Fort Yukon. My silent chagrin and worry was made almost unbearable when it dawned upon me that I had intended to make Tanana instead of Fort Yukon our meeting place. For some reason besides ignorance and eagerness I had thought that Fort Yukon was situated at the mouth of Tanana River instead of Porcupine River. When one of my friends set me right in this matter I gasped for breath and shuddered as I realized that it certainly

would take more than two weeks for Audrey to reach our trysting place. In fact I had expected my telegram to require almost that length of time considering that it had to be forwarded by mail to a remote place on Lower Tanana. From this time on I welcomed every opportunity to slow up our trip, although my efforts were not of much avail. At times I felt almost unbearable despair and I would have given much to have a friend in whom I could confide. No doubt I might then have been spared many bitter and foolish thoughts while brooding over the constant futility of my plans.

Alaska is like an open book to every lover of nature. Even without the terse eloquence of the baron or the remarkable power of observation of Maclaren, every bend of this glorious river Yukon, every new vista, every change of contour and colors under a sky line always beyond word description, was like turning pages in God's own *magnum opus*. Geological strata were exposed along the course of this mighty agent of destruction in stark naked beauty and magnificence. A journey down the Yukon is a course in geology. Even Ed surprised us with his keen interest. That a trip like ours left us more bewildered than informed only proved that the subject was too enormous and complicated. And the fact that gloom discolored many of my best impressions was only my self-imposed fate even if I could not help it. Still I grew richer

in unforgettable memories every lazy hour of those gloriously lazy days.

The Yukon River never bores one. It is always changing but never at the expense of grandeur ranging from the soft pastoral beauty of broad valleys to the severity of snow-clad mountains towering along the horizon. Only an occasional cabin breaks the unbroken primeval aspect, but even the sparse settlements are blended into the whole. And there is no poetical license in the claim that the very spirit of this country creeps into one's soul. The river is quite swift below Eagle. The baron pointed out several famous places such as Star City, Nation, and Fourth of July creeks. One is not apt to forget the fantastic color effect of Calico Bluff, and the quaint cluster of cabins known as Circle City is a sight which lingers vividly in my memory.

The river below Circle looks on larger maps like a long, wide braid woven into a crazy design by countless strands of channels. It was our fortune to get lost in this network and thus gain a more intimate knowledge of the Yukon Flats. As usual, our pilots on nightshift had neglected to observe navigation marks and the next thing was finding ourselves in a rather swift channel so narrow in places that we could barely squeeze through. Before long we were in shallow water and finally high and dry on a gravel bar. Misery loves company and we were glad that both boats were in

the same predicament. To turn back seemed an easy solution of our problem, but it proved very difficult and with many repetitions of our first dilemma before reaching any navigable channel. Visibility was limited by countless tree-dotted islands, and there was no horizon of river banks or mountains. After cruising around for a whole day, we camped on one of the larger islands. There we killed a couple of rabbits and saw many more, so fear of starvation did not enter our minds although we were frankly quite worried. The presence of a sailor and a sourdough seemed assurance that we would eventually find our way out. Opinion on location of the main channel was about evenly divided. The discussion continued until after supper when a loud whistle from a passing steamer decided the issue. Hours after this happening we still heard: "I told you so!" Nevertheless it was nearly noon the following day before we had found our way back and another night and day passed before we saw the midnight sun sink below a horizon high enough to show its glory of rose and purple and gold.

Frequently it was almost unbearably hot. Only the ever active and ferocious mosquitoes kept us from stripping off or wearing less clothes. The sun certainly labors hard in the North to make up for its neglect and parsimony during the long winters. The air is usually very clear, in higher altitudes almost incredibly so. This atmospheric con-

dition helps to counterbalance much of the loss of heat which is caused by the oblique course of the sunrays.

The days were now separated only by an almost imperceptible period of semidarkness. The sun never left the surrounding hills and mountains on clear nights. There was something so weird in the brilliant reflection of the sun directly above us, seldom reaching us but still so close that it colored taller trees with hues of gold and silver. I never ceased to wonder why this light did not shatter the stillness and profound peace of night which continued to reign even more perfect in its exposed beauty.

Time and again we were caught in traps of churning, swirling water. Trees and other floating objects invariably lodged in these places and added to the hazard. We experienced our real scares, however, when the pilots succumbed to sleep. The gentle but incessant lapping of water against the boat was a lullaby hard to resist. To wake up under an overhanging bank among roots and all sorts of debris and to hear a wild river roar and boom its threat of destruction, was always a decidedly unpleasant experience—and we had many of them. Every wish of good night to the man at the helm was therefore accompanied by a none too gently voiced reminder to stay awake, although it seldom did any good.

At least once every day we went ashore to pre-

pare our food. We lived almost entirely on fish stew. As our supply of groceries did not last very long this one constant item on our menu grew to be more fish and less stew. Rabbits and other game were scarce. The day soon came when our culinary concoction was all of native—or rather river—origin with the exception of flour, salt, and spices. Despite this lack of variety the fish tasted fine, and after a few meals I was surprised to learn that even the thick, brown salmon fat on top of the stew really was quite palatable. One day when we all took sick, the baron informed us that a salmon diet invariably causes an unpleasant and violent affliction although fortunately only for a short duration.

WHEN a sourdough tells about mosquitoes there is invariably a tone of something like pride in his voice. After becoming intimately acquainted with these ferocious insects I have found myself boasting of their truly amazing feats of savagery, feeling a sort of perverted pride in having survived so many encounters and thus lived to tell the tale. And what a tale it could be! These winged beasts of the Northlands really should have the epic they deserve with the unchallengeable rights of heroic courage, unconquerable will, and indefatigable perseverance. Their tenacity of purpose should be inspiring, at least in philosophical sense, even to the victims of such fierce instincts. I shall always claim that one simply cannot exaggerate when trying to describe some of the deeds of subarctic mosquitoes and that even the most absurd stories have the essence of a truth which one soon learns is stranger than fiction.

One windy and cold evening we had occasion to go ashore. The gravel bar we had selected rose out

of the water until it became a bush-covered river bank. For reasons of my own I remained in the boat, but my solitude was of a short duration because only a few moments later my friends returned running, cursing, gesticulating, and generally acting like panic-stricken savages. All were in various stages of deshabille. I burst into laughter, but my mirth did not last long. In less time than it takes to tell about it I was enveloped by the same thick cloud of bloodthirsty mosquitoes which my friends had encountered among the bushes. Hours later we were still hunting and killing the wild insects which despite a strong headwind had followed us out to the middle of the wide river.

The Yukon is a lonely river. Camps and cabins are few and far between and they only seem to emphasize the great loneliness. Some of the cabins were occupied by woodcutters. The steamers require a great deal of cordwood, and contracts to cut it are let all along the river. Many of the woodcutters were squawmen. We stopped at several wood camps and visited with a motley lot of men, many of whom we found very interesting. Indians had their summer camps usually at the mouths of larger tributaries, and their fish wheels were groaning and squeaking at nearly every protruding bluff where a swift current could turn and a convenient rock support this efficient contrivance. When salmon are plentiful only the choicest

fish are kept out of the large catches. We were indebted to the fish wheels and their owners for a never begrudging supply of food. Judging by the amount of smoked salmon in evidence at every camp, neither man nor beast was going to starve for some time to come.

Just before entering the Yukon Flats we noticed a number of shabby-looking tepees above a circle-shaped river bank. It looked like an ideal camping place with its low beach and protecting high and rocky bluff. Hungry for meat, one of us conceived the bright idea of trying to trade tobacco, of which we had quite a supply, for something to replace the fish diet. Rabbits had escaped our guns with annoying consistency and so had a young bear just a few hours ago although he came within a stone's throw. The baron and I volunteered, and as we had already passed the Indian encampment it was necessary to walk back across the bluff which shielded the place from our view. Arriving there after an easy hike, we found about a dozen ragged and dirty tents or tepees. Only evil-smelling squaws and children and evil-looking dogs were in evidence until we came to the largest and most dilapidated tent from which an old bent and wrinkled Indian emerged. We greeted him cordially and when he sat down we would have joined him had it not been for an angry snarl which intercepted our friendly approach. His smoke-bleary eyes fairly snapped when he looked at us with un-

guarded hatred. Disregarding the possibility that the old Indian might understand English, the baron remarked that these savages evidently hailed from some other section and probably were a bunch of roving renegades. Stories about outlaw Indians came to my mind and made me suspect that these might be of that unsavory kind. I whispered to the baron that we better be on guard. While standing before this squatting piece of toothless humanity a number of other ragged and dirty Indians as well as several squaws had formed a circle around us. Suddenly, as if in response to a command, the dogs began to bark. It had not occurred to me before that we were unarmed, and this thought startled me even more than the Indian and the whole threatening pack of dogs.

"Come on, Donn," the baron said, turning to leave. "These siwashes and their mangy dogs don't look good to me. Remember what I told you about several prospectors disappearing last year. This old son of a . . . sure eyes me aplenty. Doesn't he give you the creeps?"

The baron continued to talk louder than I thought the occasion warranted. No doubt he felt sure they did not understand him or else he did not care. Firmly but without haste we broke away from the Indians who now chattered and gesticulated with unmistakable hostility. With a deliberately slow gait we walked back toward the bluff. To our relief nobody followed us, and the dogs

were also held back although they barked and howled as if eager to get at us. When we finally reached the spruce-clad top we stopped for a well-earned rest while complimenting each other on the graceful retreat. From here we could see that our boats had moved and landed on a nearly submerged gravel bar. Only one of our partners was visible; the others must have retired for their evening nap. We waved our hands and shouted for quite a while before our signals were acknowledged.

"Guess it's Sinclair sitting up," observed the baron. "We'd better beat it back—what do you say?"

"Yes, baron, but it's early yet, and I think we should go down to the fish wheel below and see if there are any 'hump-backs' or whitefish. Do you think the wheel belongs to the siwashes?"

The baron must have heard me, but he did not reply. He had turned in the direction of the camp and looked as if he were listening intently or pondering over something.

"Do you know, Donn," he said after a long silence, "that those Indians remind me of the Squint Eyes of the lower Yukon. I've never heard of them traveling so far, but maybe they're hoboes like ourselves. I think we better leave that fish wheel alone. Those dirty siwashes were in a nasty mood and taking fish from them wouldn't help matters any. Look, Donn! See the dogs—the whole

pack is coming up this way. What in hell are they up to now?"

Startled, I rose and climbed up beside the baron on a large rock.

"Yes, and see the bucks and squaws running after them. Do you think they might be after us? They are, sure as hell—we'd better be going. Come on!"

Loose and sharp rocks made the descent from the steep bluff quite difficult. We both stumbled and fell several times. I had just scrambled to my feet after a hard fall when I bumped my knee against a rock so violently that the excruciating pain made me scream. To make things worse, I lost my balance when a moment later I tried to cross a narrow ravine and I rolled back until finally colliding with a wind-twisted spruce tree. For a moment the fall and the pain from the injured knee dazed me. Evidently the baron had not seen me fall and had continued on unaware of what had happened to me. Just as I was going to shout a call for help, a large malamute sprang at me with a vicious snarl. Unmindful of my knee, I was on my feet in an instant and managed to land a hard kick on his nose which sent him rolling and yelping over the brink of a low precipice. Judging by his continued barks, this ugly mongrel dog had changed his mind about me and had decided to follow my partner. It was a relief even if I did not want to turn the angry beast on to the baron,

although he must have been less handicapped, because presently a short but fierce howl of pain told me that he had ended the career of his pursuer, at least temporarily. Realizing that I was in no condition to run or even walk, I decided to do the next best thing and look for a hiding place. Turning back, I noticed a narrow ledge along the side of the bluff. Unable to carry any weight or even bend my knee, I crawled and slid until reaching what seemed an ideal place even to foil a crafty Indian. There was also a thicket of small spruce trees in a place where the ledge widened out, and I just reached it when the dogs rushed by directly above. Their barks and snarls, mingled with the baron's loud curses and yells, rent the air. The dogs must have traveled at a terrific speed because in only a few minutes the noise was quickly fading in the direction of the boats. I did not hear the Indians, but no doubt they were following up behind the pack.

This was becoming a bit too adventurous for me. I had, indeed, been fortunate to escape the Indians and their dogs. This I attributed more to a favorable wind upstream rather than to the hiding place. If the dogs had had only a sniff of my obnoxious scent, no retreat, however ideal, could have saved me. Under the circumstances it seemed that my best plan would be to lie low. To call for help would only reveal my whereabouts to the savages. I was about to get up and look around

when the excited chatter of passing Indians and squaws came from the ridge above me. Quickly I flung myself to the ground close to a protruding rock and under the same thick branches of a low age-gnarled tree which had hidden me so well from the dogs. It really should take a dog rather than an Indian to find me in this place and it gave me a feeling of security. When our pursuers were gone I drew a long breath of relief. Then a shot, strong, deep-throated like that from a distant cannon instead of from a mere 30-30 rifle or Maclaren's revolver, rang out and echoed among the hills. First it made my blood run cold but the next moment I wanted to shout with joy for I knew that my friends were now in the fray. The pitiful howl of a wounded dog told me what had happened.

As far as I could figure out, my hiding place was directly above a jettylike point of the bluff, which protruded like a long, thick finger out into the river. Trees on one side and a rock wall on the other reduced visibility to a very small section of my immediate surroundings. With the Indians so hostile I would have run considerable risk to venture out where my friends could see me. The overcast sky threatened rain, and it was unusually dark. I guessed the time to be about nine or ten in the evening. My knee permitting, the best bet seemed to be an attempt to cross the ridge at some low point, return about halfway to the Indian camp

and then circle back inland to our landing place. One argument against that long detour was that my friends undoubtedly would soon come to my rescue and naturally follow the same course the baron had traveled. I would also run the risk of having my scent picked up by the dogs, besides exposing myself to the Indians. After consulting my aching knee I concluded that staying in my lair was the most prudent plan.

The dogs were now returning. I heard their angry barks only occasionally and then always accompanied by sharp commands. I wondered if they would discover me on their way back now when probably inclined to roam over more ground. The Indians might not find me, but I was really uncomfortably close to the dogs in case they should happen to return over the same trail. Thoughts of what my friends might be doing raced through my mind, and I would have given a lot to know what was happening. Then another shot reverberated the air with such uncanny strength that I was sure my heart stopped beating for a moment as long as a fragment of eternity. It had a different and unfamiliar sound so I knew an Indian had fired it. Breathless, I waited while the dogs howled in unison and then followed three or four shots in rapid succession. An Indian shouted not very far away, and a dog whined and yelped as if mortally wounded. The fact that this last volley came from a considerable distance from the shore and much

nearer my hiding place worried me even more than anything else, because I could not understand why the boats had left. The river was, of course, their only means of escaping an attack, but surely they were planning to come to my rescue. If I knew my partners right, it would take more than a handful of Indians and a few mongrel dogs to scare them. Their intention might be to land near the Indian camp, expecting that I had been taken there. In any event it would be just as near to the place where the baron had last seen me. Had it not been for the unpleasant uncertainty of my friend's strategic intentions, the dogs, and my cursed luck to hurt my knee at this most inopportune time, I would certainly have dared the Indians alone, especially now when they must have realized that our party could not be taken without a fight. Even if outlaws, they must have known that American laws frown upon this kind of warfare and that federal officers can be like angry Gods when finally aroused. Still these thoughts offered very little comfort except to strengthen my conviction that it would not take much to scare our attackers. Probably they had been successful at this racket before and had thought this was another opportunity to acquire supplies and weapons. It helped matters very little to speculate on the nature of this adventure, and I soon experienced a sinking feeling when I realized how utterly helpless and unprotected I was: not even a pocketknife to

augment what little courage I had managed to retain. Fencing was the only sport of self-defense I had learned, and that required at least a good, substantial stick.

The interim of silence which followed for another half hour or more seemed both ominous and interminable. I had expected that the boats would reach the camp in much less time. From there they would be within easy call from my hiding place. The Indians had evidently decided not to return the fire, and their dogs must have been called back and leashed. My knee improved after a vigorous massage, and I was sure the injury was not dangerous even if serious enough under the circumstances. Just as I was about to crawl out and try to find a place from which I could see the river, I heard some small rocks rustle faintly as they tumbled down; another breathless moment and there came the unmistakable sound of hurrying footsteps approaching either from below or on the same ledge where I was hiding. In the latter case, whoever it might be would come within a few steps from my lair and could not help finding me. Quickly I rose to a crouching position, ready to leap if need be. Holding my breath as if the sound of it might endanger me and with a wildly pounding heart, I saw the puny figure of an Indian hurry toward me. His face was fixedly turned in the direction of the river, which was the only thing that saved me from being observed until the moment when I sprung at

him. My fist first struck him below his high cheekbone and he emitted a piercing scream. Then with a swiftness and force hard to claim credit for, my other hand dug deep into the soft flesh of his neck and he fell into a limp heap with a sickening, gurgling noise. Acting as if in convulsions, he rolled nearer the edge and then slid down out of sight. When I came up I noticed that a tree had stopped his fall. Tearing a strip off his ragged shirt I tied him to the tree so that he could not struggle loose and fall before regaining full consciousness. After that he should be able to free himself easily, and I left him feeling sure that our encounter could never develop into anything more serious even if justified as self-defense. This unarmed and middle-aged savage was, after all, hardly a very dangerous enemy, and I harbored no hatred toward him. For the first time I became aware of my injured knee, and every step felt as if a thousand needles were being inserted. But regardless of the pain and with all fear of Indians and dogs completely gone, I clinched my teeth and started back over the trail toward the camp.

When the river came into view I saw our boats slowly approaching the bank. One was about a hundred yards ahead of the other. It was too dark to see very clearly, but it struck me as peculiar that my partners could hide themselves so well behind the low sides of the boats and still manage to row and steer in the swift current. I was proud

of my comrades in arms and I am sure I could not have been more interested and excited had our boats been the mighty fleet of England advancing in battle formation. Maclaren must have been in command as he always was in every emergency. Armed to their teeth, with one mighty 30-30 carbine in one boat and a formidable 38 Iver Johnson revolver in the other, these two make-shift men-of-war were steadily drawing nearer to finish a never officially recorded battle on the Yukon River. Forgetting all thoughts of danger, I ran out on the bluff, swinging my hat, waving and shouting more in the manner of one cheering than as a signal of distress. Three shots from the nearest boat acknowledged that I had been seen and the helmsman swung his skiff toward me. The other boat stopped but did not follow, apparently wanting to maintain its strategical position in front of the enemy stronghold until all was well.

There was no sign of either savages or dogs while the limping hero descended to embark on the rescuing boat. Not until I was safely seated did my shipmates expose themselves. No doubt they figured that if the Indians had not taken a shot at the splendid target I had furnished there was no more shooting to be expected.

Despite the risk, we decided to land at the camp. The landing party consisted of Maclaren and the baron, who volunteered for the task, and as the best marksman I was chosen to protect them in case

of need with a barrage from my gun. The Indian camp, however, was completely deserted, and our friends soon returned with the report that the enemy forces had been routed.

"Guess we killed them all," commented Ed. After lashing together the boats we continued our interrupted journey. Evidently I had replaced the baron in his position as the hero of the occasion. I was in the midst of my story when we rounded the unforgettable bluff where the Indian probably was still peacefully unconscious of his fate at my hands. Just as I rose to get a better view, a bullet whizzed through the air, far from its intended target but near enough to cause five brave mariners to drop as if they had all been hit at the same time. Angry and excited, some of us clamored for another chance at the cowardly siwashes, but our level-headed commander decided that we had had enough fighting. Swift oar-strokes soon took us far away from this scene of such unusual adventure.

OUR TRIP had already required much more time than first planned and we were about eight days behind the schedule when the buildings of the former Hudson's Bay Company post Fort Yukon came into view. This important trading center is situated some three or four miles above the mouth of Porcupine River.

I had only casually told Ed and the baron that I expected to meet Audrey at Fort Yukon. They had evidently forgotten it, because it was never mentioned. Besides, I had no reasons to confide in my partners. Theirs was not my conception of love, and only irony would be my reward for a "true confession" story. Before reaching Fort Yukon, I was accused of being a kill-joy, so my depression and mental turmoil must have been noticed. I did not try to defend myself, did not care to, because I was living in my own dreams, and my friends never knew that I had landed in fancy long before our boats were pulled up on the low river bank near a big building in this rather

pretentious village. But there was no one to meet us although the day was young, not even a curious Indian. Disregarding my companions, I rushed ashore, climbed the bank and ran over to a building which displayed the sign of a post office. But there was no mail for me, and my inquiry about Audrey revealed that no woman answering my description had been seen in Fort Yukon. Even if all this had been anticipated I felt crestfallen, and my eyes were swimming in tears before I managed to stammer a few words of thanks to the friendly clerk.

Outside the building I experienced a sudden reaction of calm and void. Instead of the usual savage intensity of my feelings, beyond sense and control, and which can come like a crested wave in the dead calm of my mind, I felt empty and lost and without a single hopeful, comforting thought to hold on to in this confusion. Afraid to face my companions, I wandered for hours along the high river bank above the village. When I had regained a little outward composure I returned. Of all the questions and remarks hurled at me I remember only one:

“Oh, that’s right. You expected to meet Audrey here, didn’t you? Cheer up, paleface, she isn’t going to give you up if I know her right.”

Somehow I derived a great deal of comfort from this advice.

Desperate, I pleaded for a stay of at least a day

or two. Grudgingly my friends consented, but when I again, after two long days of fruitless waiting, asked for more time, they refused. We were broke, and that was one argument that could not be refuted. Early next morning I saw the buildings of Fort Yukon fade in light mist and I felt listless and indifferent, felt like one doomed to failure.

Later the same day we saw the snow-capped glory of the Endicott Mountains against the horizon. The peaks were tinted a soft rose and dull gold by the low sun. It gave me an unforgettable thrill to see this last barrier against the Arctic Ocean and to realize that somewhere among those mountains was Koyukuk, the goal of our fondest dreams. After another day of slow but uninterrupted traveling the banks closed in, and it was a relief to leave the flat country and again have the nearness of hills and mountains.

When we met a steamer above the Lower Ramps I had a feeling that Audrey was aboard, but there was only a friendly exchange of greetings with strangers when we passed so close that I could distinguish every face of the many passengers watching us.

We stopped at Fort Hamlin and also at Tanana. Unfavorable news from Koyukuk caused us to give up our original project, and we decided to continue on to Nome unless able to find work at some camp along the route. While waiting at Tanana for a boat, two brothers who had struck it rich

near Boatman were "painting the town red." It so happened that the baron was acquainted with them. Although our thirst must have been evident to these wealthy miners, we were never treated, and only the baron was permitted to enjoy their hospitality. The result was that our friend became intoxicated and unmanageable. He refused to listen to us, stubbornly declining to leave when we were ready to continue. Imagine our surprise when we, after an absence of only a few hours, found one of our boats gone. It was not in sight on the wide expanse of the river and we were really consternated, hardly daring to believe that we had lost the boat and the supplies which were indispensable in this remote wilderness. Inquiries revealed that an empty boat had been seen drifting from our camp a short while ago. The baron could not be found, and we decided to leave without him, realizing that the loss of the boat would be more serious than one less in the partnership. With two men rowing constantly we sped on and our efforts were soon rewarded. We spied our wayward friend, shouting and waving his hands as he stood hatless and excited in the missing boat. The baron was still drunk as a lord when rescued. We concluded from the fragments of information he could furnish from his muddled mind that his acquaintances had tired of him and then deliberately had put him in the boat and sent him adrift.

Before leaving, I sent two letters to Audrey, ad-

dressing one to Fairbanks and one to Fort Yukon. After telling her my story as I would have told it had she been listening to me, frankly, intimately, and with some of the simplicity of expression she had taught me to love, I outlined our itinerary and asked her to communicate with me at Nome, our intended destination. It is also part of my memories that I did not have money enough for postage stamps and only after converting my beloved gun into cash could this and other pressing needs be taken care of.

Much to my surprise, I soon gained a serenity of mind, or rather a sort of brooding calm, while floating down the river. Some of the intriguing, tranquil aspect of this wonderful country must have crept into my susceptible soul. The country was slowly assuming the characteristics of the Arctic. The trees gradually shrunk into mere dwarfs and they looked old and withered with their bent and twisted trunks. Rainy days were unbelievably dreary and bleak; still when the sun broke through the clouds everything changed as if by magic. A somewhat similar change was also very evident in the natives. The Indians were smaller in stature, and I thought of the trees when I saw them. Mentally they also descended lower and lower and I was told that the tribes nearest to the Eskimos were still living in fear of their age-old enemies. Then one crosses the race boundary and meets some of the finest and best of all Eskimos.

Thinking of Darwin and evolution, I wondered if the constant strife and warfare as well as the geographical adaptation of the two races might not have had something to do with the ascent of one and the descent of the one less fortunate, less able to survive.

Early one morning we landed at Andreafski. The baron had several acquaintances there, and we were cheered by the good news that a "strike" had been made. A miner offered us a chance to work on shares but Nome had more lure than the uncertainty of a new mine. Connections were established, however, and we promised to return in case the outlook improved.

Below Andreafski we found the first signs of approaching the mouth of the mighty river. Here it widens out, and the mountains and hills which line the valley become lower and more blurred in the haze of increasing distance. The main channel is continuously being divided by islands which grow in size and number farther out in the vast delta. The low banks were lined with willows instead of spruce and poplar trees. Tremendous grass-covered marshes, intersected by innumerable narrow channels, came into view and we began to wonder how even the river could find its way through lowlands which seemed to block its passage in every direction.

Wild fowl became so plentiful that this otherwise desolate and monotonous delta land fairly

teemed with winged inhabitants. Still it was hard to imagine a more dreary country. Something akin to dread crept into my heart, and I noticed that my companions were unusually sullen and silent.

Frequently the river widened out into large, shallow lakes. The navigable channel meandered through these, making turns and curves where least expected. At nights we frequently grounded in places where the river silt was covered by only a few inches of water. In full daylight we managed to escape most mishaps by following navigation marks. Excepting temporary camps of hunters, there are no native settlements in the delta. Sighting a party of Eskimos on a brush-covered island, we stopped for what proved to be a very pleasant visit. They told us many interesting stories about this no man's land. One was of recent origin and dealt with some white men lost in the labyrinth of channels we had now entered. They were rescued from an almost inevitable death when found by Eskimos far out on one of those immense mudflats where nearly every artery of water is finally lost without any navigable outlet. Only the natives can find their way through this delta but they are said to fear evil swamp spirits and prefer to stay away. One needs only to look at the criss-cross lines on a map to realize the bewildering nature of the Yukon delta lands.

WHEN we passed the wireless station, which, by the way, I thought must be one of the most lonely and secluded in the world, and entered the bay, the wind was freshening from the north, and that meant storm. The ocean murmured and moaned along distant beaches; boomed and thundered over faraway bars. Even the angry little waves in the bay bore white crests, looking really beautiful with their delicate lace of flying spume. Sea gulls, poising gracefully with lazy wing beats, were flying low, and their call had piercing notes of lament and fear. My heart kept sinking lower and lower the nearer we came to the white wildness of the ocean, and I could hear the swish and crash of giant breakers. Distance over water is deceptive, we found. The high mountain-island in the ocean entrance to the bay which had looked so near, appeared just as distant after traveling several miles directly toward it. Late in the afternoon we finally reached open sea.

At first the wind was favorable and we were

soon out beyond the breakers, heading northward toward the cape which juts far out into Bering Sea and shelters like an enormous jetty the famous trading post, St. Michael. We had refused to heed an Eskimo hunter who had warned us when we left the bay that a storm was in the offing. We had also expected rough weather, but little did we realize that this is one of the stormiest countries in the world. Bering Sea is quite shallow along the coast, and the winds, which are invariably cyclonic, can whip the sea into something no man may venture out into with a small craft and expect to survive.

Our boats had traveled closely together until after leaving the bay. Then we drifted apart. The improvised sails proved too dangerous in the fierce squalls and we found it necessary to depend entirely upon our oars, two of us rowing and one steering in our boat. Riding a storm on Bering Sea in a sixteen-foot rowboat was more than an adventure; it was rather one of those happenings which border on the unbelievable, leaving one with a confused memory. And nearly all details thereof were soon drowned in the intensity of primitive emotions, in the horror of feeling doomed, and in the apathy which followed as an equally violent reaction.

It was really amazing how one's senses adjusted themselves to meet this supreme test. The howl of the wind as it lashed the roaring, hissing waves into still more fury did not render me unable to hear quite clearly what was going on in the immediate

vicinity of the boats, such as the sharp clashes of colliding waves, their vicious attacks against our boat and a myriad of other noises which all seemed to have some particular threat or promise. In fact, my attention was more and more focused upon relatively unimportant and even absurd thoughts and irrelevant things as the storm grew stronger. Some of those uninvited thoughts felt like acts of profanity against the terrible grandeur of this play of the Gods, but they helped by taking my mind off a pandemonium which could drive one wild with fear.

Maclarens was at the helm. Leaning hard on the oar which served as rudder, he steered the boat over mountains and valleys of water. The wind was shoreward but shifted frequently from its main direction, causing a choppy sea with waves that clashed head-on or sideways. I saw cascades thrown at least fifty feet into the air and one not quite so tall toppled over into our boat, making it necessary to drop the oars and bale out the water. Finally it required the entire time of one man to keep us afloat.

There was no let-up to the ever-increasing fury of the storm. Our only chance to survive was to keep away from the coast, but that became a difficult task. The other boat was more successful in battling wind and currents, but we found to our horror that ours was losing ground and steadily drifting nearer the rocky coast. Even if our friends

would have been unable to render any assistance, merely the fact that we could see them was in itself encouraging. When they disappeared it felt like another blow to our dwindling hope.

During the storm, I experienced a mental upheaval which soon developed into something like a case of dual personality. The primitive and elemental within me was ruled and whipped into action by the instinct to survive rather than by fear. However, my normal self actually seemed to coexist. I was always conscious and able to observe, though not to control, my strange thoughts, acts, and reactions. I could not reason clearly when the abnormal was reigning so supremely around us. Even the inevitable certainty that another leaping, spitting, frenzied mountain of churning water would rush against us with ever-increasing malice, was another added torture. Sometimes one of the real giants among the waves would poise and actually seem to hesitate above us before it bent its splendid crest for a crushing blow. But our feathery craft acted like a living thing and would move by a power we could not account for, would move only a few feet and then again and again escape by a margin of inches. The frothy scum filled the bottom of the boat and clung to skin and clothes like sticky soapsuds. The rapid blows were never shouldered; our boat never took any punishment. It was like an evasive rubber ball and as long as it could float our keelless boat found the

water a gently resistant cushion. The roaring, fighting water seemed furious, but our lightness was such a contrast to all its might that it could not hold us for a deathblow, unless we were taken close enough to be hurled against the towering cape where the sea was sending line upon line of its white-helmeted warrior-waves to destruction. Although in the very midst of the horror of this spectacle, I never ceased to marvel at its sublime grandeur, its terrible drama of defiance and orgy of destruction. With its precipitous walls and mighty palisades the cape loomed like a gigantic medieval fortress.

No words could give even the faintest picture of the unbelievable display of destructive power which few men are ever permitted to view so closely—and still live to tell the tale! Our bodies were as if frozen stiff, but pain and discomfort did not seem to matter; in fact, we were hardly conscious thereof. We were all mind, and mere physical sensitivity was crowded back, probably because it served no good purpose in this fight for survival. I remember removing my shoes. The vividness of just this act remains with absurd strength. What could be the use of taking them off when swimming would be as useless as attempting to fly? Instinct and not reason governed us. Only the simplest, most primitive and even irrelevant thoughts occupied me. Mother and Audrey were very near, so near that the comfort of their phan-

tom presence was incredibly actual. With little or no effort came memories and visions to do their bit of good and mercy in our hour of need. The unexpected suddenness in everything which constitutes a storm, or rather a cyclone, is its most terrifying aspect. It is a reign of violence, and the anarchy it creates means nothing but death to those who cannot escape the disturbed elements. To knowingly face and defy a storm on Bering Sea in the manner we did was not courage; it was stark folly. That we faced this cataclysm as men should was its best part and we were both proud and surprised to have stood the test so well—not one of us whimpered, not a single one fell down on the biggest though most foolish job we had yet tackled on this long journey.

One unforgettable time a high wave broke alongside the boat, but our pilot swung away just in time, and we realized that we had to thank his strength and presence of mind for another narrow escape.

It was astonishing how our light craft continued to avoid the menacing waves without capsizing. No matter how high or strong, the white-capped combers only lifted us up, unable to get a firm hold of something too small and light for its crushing but awkward strength. Our navigator saw to it that we were out of reach whenever a wave commenced to break. Even if necessary to bale continuously we kept the water under control.

Arctic twilight always lingers long. The setting sun does not sink abruptly as in the tropics but follows the sky line, above and below, for a long distance, thus producing the softly suffused and many-colored wonder of arctic twilight. The sun had just broken through the clouds, scattering the darkness of the quickly subsiding storm, when we came near the cape. Nothing could have seemed so irrevocably sure, so despairingly unavoidable as the death that now reached out to claim us. As we were about to give up our frantic struggle to escape, we could feel a strong current carry us away at an incredible speed, keeping us a few hundred yards from where the waves were crashing against the perpendicular wall of the cape. Before we realized what had happened we had swung into the dead calm on the lee side and joined the other party who said they had been there for quite a while. Afterward we heard of the swift tidal currents in Bering Sea and it must have been on one of them that we had succeeded in cheating death at a time when it looked as though we were booked for "Davy Jones's locker."

St. Michael turned out to be a port of disappointment, although it was a busy and interesting place. We had expected to find work, but all efforts were futile. Still broke, we could see no other way but to continue on to Nome in the boats which had proven themselves so seaworthy. McLaren's revolver went begging for a buyer, and in

desperation we sold a couple of blankets to get the necessary flour and beans for the trip. Then like the reckless mariners we had been, we decided to cross Bering Sea, hoping to make the ninety miles to Nome in two or three days. The distance along the coast was estimated to be over four hundred miles. Early one promising morning we set sail. In a few hours, however, the wind shifted, and when we were about fifteen miles off shore we were caught in a violent storm. Fortunately some Eskimos and two soldiers stationed at Unalakleet, a military telegraph station, had sighted our boats. They built a large fire to help guide us through the rocky entrance of the Unalakleet River. We encountered breakers several miles from shore, undoubtedly due to reefs or shallow water, and we were riding on foamy crests before we even had a chance to swing the sterns around toward the waves. Both boats were in a sinking condition when they managed to make it through the shoals. We were received with wonderful hospitality by the two lonely soldiers. After spending three days of rest and abundance, we pulled out through the breakers and continued along the coast, having abandoned our original plan to cross Bering Sea as entirely too risky.

The three long weeks which followed were not days of adventure. They contained only the disheartening realization of how foolish it was to attempt such a hazardous trip with rowboats and

without sufficient provisions. It was too dangerous to travel at night. The coast was so steep and rocky and with very few beaches that it proved difficult to find any safe landing places. Storms frequently came with hurricane violence, and strong currents took us far out of our course in spite of oars and sails—and much cursing. Every evening was another harassing experience of trying to get ashore, riding on waves charging as if they were angry at us, cooking our scanty meals, drying wet blankets and clothes over driftwood fires, only to face another day of similar and new hardships. Berries and fishy-tasting parrot gulls cooked with flour had already been on our menu a whole week when we reached Norton Bay. The weather looked favorable, so we decided to cut across to Isaac's Point from Cape Denbigh. Contrary to expectations it turned out to be a rather dangerous undertaking due to tidal currents and vicious squalls.

"Never again, so help me . . ." was the unanimous opinion of all five when we finally reached Bluff, an important mining camp in the Nome district. Two days later we arrived in Nome City and there we took up our abode in a deserted and partly sand-filled cabin near the mouth of a river and adjoining an Eskimo village.

FROM the viewpoint of a workingman Nome offered more opportunities than Dawson, although in our case it proved difficult to get work. Our cabin came as nearly being unsuitable for human habitation as possible even where men are not particular in this respect. Consequently we spent very little time there, preferring the hall of a local branch of the United Mine Workers and the many saloons to the cold and musty place we called home.

Once we tried to bring in a raft of logs, but a storm frustrated that effort of making a few dollars. Beach mining was tried with little success. During the rest of the season one or two of us were always out looking for work and occasionally finding short jobs. A dry summer had caused a surplus of labor so we were not entirely at fault even if we loafed around more than necessary. Ignorant of conditions in a mine called "Submarine" I accepted an offer to work there, only to discover that my predecessor had just been dug out after a cave-in and that this occurrence was

common enough to be considered almost trivial. Five dollars for that one and only day of labor was all I had earned when on a cold and stormy day the last boat left for Seattle. Incidentally, we had been warned that unemployed as well as gamblers and other undesirables were being rounded up for deportation by federal marshals. To avoid this fate we did not go near any saloons until after the siren of the SS *Victoria* had announced her departure.

I had written Audrey several times, but even the last mail from Fort Yukon, upon which I had pinned my hope so strongly, brought only silence and another blow of disappointment. For all that, it never shook my faith in her. This confidence was my best hold on myself, and there was more encouragement in my silent worship of one who embodied the finest and truest I had ever created out of reality and fancy, more than I could have hoped for in my most daring dreams. It imposed the duties of waiting and of being true to her, but this time I was not going to disappoint anybody. I had learnt a lesson in Dawson—learnt it well enough never to forget.

As a young boy my father had taught me to play chess quite well. I still played it at every opportunity, and one day when I was watching a game I was invited to sit in. I happened to win and that proved the means of getting acquainted and eventually gaining the friendship of a prominent man in Nome. Learning of my reduced cir-

cumstances, he offered to help, but I refused to accept anything but the offer of a job in a mine in which he was interested. Unfortunately the work was not to commence until after the trails permitted freighting with dogteams so there was no immediate relief in sight for five cold and hungry vagabonds. Necessity, however, made it necessary to appeal to my new friend for assistance, and he was kind enough to guarantee my account with a local store.

This influential man also had the reputation of being quite a dog fancier and was the proud owner of one of the best teams in Nome even if it did not measure up to any of those belonging to Scotty Allan, Seppala, and other famous winners of the all-Alaskan sweepstake races. I was to accompany him to Bluff, where the mine was located, one of the first days in December. Outside mail arrived the day before we left. The joy of receiving a letter of love and good news from Mother was mixed with the disappointment of not hearing from Audrey.

Undaunted by a snowstorm which had raged for several days, we started out on our sixty-mile journey and arrived in Bluff the following day after an exciting trip.

After three months of apprenticeship in placer mining and dogmushing I returned to Nome, feeling my best with hardened muscles and with a sort of calm contentment which I had found dur-

ing the solitude of a cabin shared with a silent Irish miner and while freighting alone between Bluff and Solomon. Only the presence of the girl I loved could have made her more real than she now was as a beloved creation of fancy. Audrey was always with me, willed into existence by that same urge which causes the most abstract, the most daring conceptions of happiness to be the most absolute actualities in one's life. She had given me another reason why I could never accept reality in a materialistic sense; it was absurd to my way of thinking, and I just could not comprehend anything but a spiritual philosophy of life.

As soon as I arrived in Nome I rushed over to the sandspit where we had made our home. My old friends were all there gathered around a pot of beans. If the noise indicated anything they must have been more than glad to see me back. MacLaren handed me a large, bulky letter from Audrey. First I removed a hundred-dollar bill which I allowed to be passed around, feeling that it would have been almost cruel to deny this pleasure to men who had known so much privation. Besides, my money was also theirs. Then I went into another room and read the letter for which I had waited so long. I keenly appreciated the fine consideration my friends showed me. They commented on my love affair without a word of irony or even curiosity—now they knew and respected it as something worthy of approval.

"I expect to be leaving for Nome on the next boat," her letter stated. All the many details pertaining to that outstanding fact seemed so unimportant and were all condensed in that brief statement. According to the date of her letter, which was postmarked in Fort Yukon several days after we had been there, she should have arrived in Nome on one of the last boats of the season. The fact that she had not been seen by any of our mutual acquaintances seemed proof enough that something had gone wrong with her plans. The steamship office stated that her name was not on any passenger list of boats from St. Michael. In spite of all this I refused to despair, confident that the next mail would bring another letter.

Days without the identity of anything eventful went by. During our brief stay in Andreafski I had met a miner who was developing some promising property, and he now sent word for me to come. My partners advised me to go. With the money Audrey had sent me I had enough to finance the long trip and still provide food to last my friends for several months. Maclaren remarked that he had heard that I was considered quite a hand with dogs and no praise could have pleased me more. After considering the matter for a few days I decided to go unless news from Audrey should change the plan. Overland mail was expected in about a week.

It proved no easy task to equip for the long

mush. My friends all helped and Maclaren gave his entire time, working and planning as if he were going along. With true Scotch ability to bargain he bought some dogs well worth more than the price paid and in a few days I had an outfit which should have met with the approval of even more discerning men. As a token of his friendship Maclaren gave me "Graben," the dog which for years had been his inseparable companion. Without a word of voiced gratitude I accepted the gift. But during one long moment affection tugged at its leash, and I would have given a lot to be able to hide the embarrassing tears which rolled down my cheeks—such expressions of sentiment are out of place among men in Alaska.

"I know you'll treat him right," he said. "He's a mighty fine dog. There isn't a better leader in the country."

Apparently oblivious of my presence, Maclaren took Graben's head between his hands, brought it close to his own, and then talked to him more intimately, more sentimentally than merely as friend to friend and in a manner not at all what one might expect from a man looking so cold and unapproachable. The dog was now mine, and he acted as if he already knew it. At first it surprised me, but after learning to know Graben better, I realized that he had understood what his old master had told him.

No one could have been more prompt and early

at the post office than I when the arrival of mail broke the slow, monotonous tempo of expectant but uneventful days. My last long wait was rewarded with another letter from Audrey. She was in Ruby, having been detained there by sickness while on her way to Nome. Always reluctant to dwell on anything pertaining to herself—a fine, discreet and never affected reserve—she merely mentioned briefly, almost impersonally, her own troubles, but still I could understand that she had been so gravely ill that I might have lost her. Even the thought of having been so near to life's most irrevocable tragedy felt like a blow and made my eyes grow dim. I now hurried over to the U. S. Army cable office to send her a wire. After a few words of cheer and endearment so strong that blood mounted in my cheeks when the soldier read my message aloud, I asked Audrey to meet me in Andreafski where I expected to be as soon as my dog-team could take me there. If she were unable to make the trip I would continue on to Ruby.

Too impatient to wait for better weather, I hit the trail early the following morning. Amidst shouts of well wishes and the incessant barking of dogs frantically eager to start, I was off, soon vanishing in the white nothingness of a light snow flurry. Closing my eyes to the rush of the cold wind and with a thrill strong enough to hurt, I bid Audrey to be with me. Vivid and real as only in a dreamer's dream, she came, and after that it

seemed only natural that I never knew one moment of loneliness on this lonely trail.

On my third day out from Nome I ran into the blizzard which became both the beginning and the end of the adventures in this story.

FEELING numb and lost as if coming out of a deep trance, I was now slowly wakening from my long sleep. Only now and then was the wild, restless pace of my confused thoughts and distorted dreams slowed up so that I could think clearly even for a few moments. But these intervals also grew shorter, and they always ended as if crushed by blows from some menacing giant hovering over me. Then I cringed in the instinctive fear and horror of one feeling death very near. Something indescribably ghastly, something I had never heard in the deep howl of the blizzard, struck new terror into a heart leaping and beating within me like a frightened animal in its cage. It sounded like a sublime but dreadful requiem. My swirling mind pictured scenes so cruelly distorted that I often wished for the mercy of darkness. Only my arms responded when I tried to move; the rest of my body seemed almost paralyzed. My clearest thoughts, and the only ones I remember distinctly, revolved around death, when and how it would

come. Soon even these thoughts faded in the blur of its nearness.

There was a stealthy approach of something vague, unnatural, and crazily twisted as phantoms in a nightmare. My hands tore and clawed at my throat and chest as if that could relieve a mind now tormented to the very point of insanity. I wanted to pray, but there were no words to utter, no words to fit. And in another wild dream, when I imagined seeing the thick-veined hands and predatory fingers of a regular fairy-tale giant reach out to stop Audrey from coming to my rescue, then I cursed and screamed in delirious anguish. What a just punishment for me in the thought of her now coming in my own hour of need! Not so long ago—untouched by time as if it had happened within the brief space of moments—she had asked me to help, had begged me to forgive and forget. Like a vindictive savage I had refused, leaving her to face a life that threatened a more cruel, more revolting end than merely death.

How contemptible we can be in our acts of arrogance and self-righteousness. Again and again did I retrace my steps into the past to live over that tempestuous scene in Dawson which time had never dimmed, almost delighting in this ever-haunting memory of wrong and remorse and pain. It lightened my heart as would a self-imposed duty of penitence. Blinded by jealousy, I had set myself up as her judge, forgetting that I had erred and

sinned as often and perhaps for less reason than she had by selling a body so tragically rich in what all men covet. What a pitiful sight of injustice and littleness I now made before my heart and conscience! What a bungler and fool I had been!

Cold and clammy, I trembled in chills which seemed to creep into my heart. I stirred uneasily, neither awake nor fully asleep, although my mind raced on with incredible swiftness and clarity. It was more difficult to breathe, I felt weaker, and the clasp around my throat tightened. Suddenly a voice from far away rang out like a call to come. Rigid, tense, I held my breath, listening. There was also a tone of buoyant, happy tenderness in the outcry, something both strange and familiar. Though remote it was strong enough to pierce the noise of the storm and then I distinctly heard my name called: "Donn, Donn. . ." quickly, repeated and repeated, nearer and nearer until I recognized the voice now breaking into a gasping cry as Audrey's. Still, I did not dare to believe it possible, even if I knew that we were soon to meet. A warm hand slipped under my head and held it while a strong drink burned like fire down my parched throat. Then my eyes opened slowly and they searched the eager, radiant face above me as if it were a stranger's. . . . Drowsy, crazy senses must be playing a fiendish trick of illusion, I thought. Startled, almost stunned, I now discovered the faint trace of a scar on one lip, near a

corner of her quivering mouth. And when it flashed into clearer view I realized that it could be no one but Audrey—at last we had met! An avalanche of words came to tell her my long tale of love and longing, but they were all choked in a throat tightened as if something heavy were lying across it. As my eyes closed while we met in a kiss it seemed strange that I should again think of the climax in our drama of stormy love and live over its scenes, distinct and vivid as only a feverish mind can render a memory, but without its element of regret and despair. Our deeds of folly and wrong—and they were many—were now dead things of a dead past. And what had been only a hope was now a dream come true as I clutched its living reality in my arms just as death was reaching out to snatch one of us away.

Unmindful of the storm plastering her face with snow, Audrey had thrown back the hood of her parka. Her eyes were like dark pools with two lights gleaming, and her hair was white with frost and snow. But even if blurred, the face bending over me looked more alluring, different, ennobled, subtly changed into something I had never seen before. When she talked I could feel her lips brush against mine—they were so close that the din of no blizzard could have robbed me out of a whispered word.

"It doesn't seem so strange now, dear," I said weakly and with a tremor. "We sure have tried

hard to find each other, haven't we? Fate—or whatever it is—is surely queer. Maybe this is our reward for having played our parts the best we knew how—don't you think?"

"You haven't changed a bit, Donn," Audrey said in a voice that had both a sob and a low peal of laughter.

"Like me any less for it, dear?"

"No, Donn, you just keep on being yourself. I love to hear you talk the way you do."

The blizzard was now spending its waning force on intermittent blows. Still enough strength was gathered during spells of comparative lull for outbreaks which had much of the old roar and fury. Audrey's dogs were standing by, a young Eskimo attending the impatient and yelping huskies. Arms I had never known to be so strong assisted me to her sled where I was wrapped up until practically buried in blankets and furs.

Under the conditions it was necessary to leave most of my supplies. My dogs had already been unhitched and allowed to run loose. The Eskimo assured me that he would find my sled any time after the storm and even if completely covered up by the snow. One of my dogs was missing but I was unable to tell which one.

With the sudden jerk of a strong and rested dog team we were now off racing through the still thick and madly whirling snow. Audrey placed my head against her chest, and I could feel the softness of

her breasts, hear the furious tempo of her heart. Then she bent down, leaving her cheek to touch and warm mine. After that I remember no more until waking up when Audrey was trying to force some ill-tasting medicine into my unwilling mouth. I was then lying on a wide bed in a large room with dark, smoke-stained log walls.

Audrey told me later that she had watched me sink into unconsciousness with a peculiar but contented smile playing around my lips. She also told me that this deep slumber or coma had lasted for several days and for a while they had all despaired of recovery. I had frozen my fingers and toes quite badly. Extremely high fever had also set in to complicate matters.

After only a short convalescence, however, I was again my old but weak normal self. One day I insisted, despite Audrey's protests, on leaving my first and only sick bed. With my arms around her supporting shoulders I walked about in the cabin wondering if I were not still dwelling in a borderland between reality and dream—it seemed that strange.

ONE MORNING, a day or two later, when almost fully recovered except for a distressing pain in my frostbitten feet and fingers, Audrey asked me to go out for a walk. It was a glorious morning of calm and crisp cold. I knew what was coming. She had consistently hushed every word of confession, every allusion to the past, afraid that I might not stand the inevitable strain. Now was the time, she had decided, when we could face everything.

On a high knoll, directly below the partly snow-buried cabin and overlooking the barren mountains around us, she pulled me down beside her in the soft snow, removed my gloves, and took my hands in a tight grip while looking into my eyes as only one woman has ever done in my life.

"Donn," she said very softly, "you've asked me so many times to tell what happened to me since you left Atlin. You know, of course, why I wouldn't. You've been a very sick boy, Donn. Do you know that I've been down on my knees pray-

ing for faith to believe and to hope that you'd pull through—yes, I have! Somehow my mother's religion means a whole lot more to me now. Guess you were right, after all. Now I'm ready to tell you everything—shall I?"

She raised my cold hands to her face and soon they were warm and wet with tears.

Audrey's effort to tell her tale of life and love without dwelling on the unavoidable personal element had in itself a bit of added drama and accentuated the tense undertone of erotic currents which had carried her with such irresistible strength through every happening until it seemed as if they had guided her toward a fixed goal. To descend or to rise was always the result of a conscious purpose, part of a premeditated scheme, which she carried out with tremendous emotional strength. She had sold herself, bartered her lovely body, not because of weakness or necessity but to satisfy an ambition, for the lure of the stage where she truly belonged; she had reformed for the sake of a love which knew no bounds and would not accept defeat. I could think of no higher capacity of devotion, of no character stronger, better, cleaner.

After giving a broad and rapid summary of her experiences in Atlin, she took up the threads of the more interesting details, retracing her story with the freedom of form and the intuitive sense of drama she mastered as a born artist.

"I know you liked the Vista House, Donn," she

continued. "Well, I did too, in a way, but not after what happened just before I took sick. That house was haunted, Donn—oh, please don't laugh! Perhaps you won't after I tell you more about it. You remember the unfurnished room in the corner facing the road to the east, don't you? One day you asked me why the door to it was always kept locked. I didn't tell you because I thought you'd poke fun at me, but I showed you the damp, gloomy room and you remarked that it certainly looked spooky. Well, it was! What a fool I was for not telling you. You'd never have left me alone in the Vista House even if you hadn't believed a word of it."

Still chuckling, though against my wish, now that she spoke so gravely, I said:

"Can't say that I take much stock in ghost stories. Anyway I didn't like that room; it did give me the creeps."

"Do you know, Donn," she went on, looking even more sombre, "the door to that cursed room wouldn't stay closed, and it always opened of itself no matter how carefully it was locked. An old-timer told me that the original owner of Vista House had been kept in there while a raving maniac and that he had died there too after a fit that scared everybody away from the house. Auntie and I found the door wide open twice and for no reason whatsoever. After she'd left I got a carpenter to fix up the lock, and nothing happened

until I took sick in the fall. I had gone to bed early one evening, but a splitting headache kept me awake, so I got up to get an aspirin tablet out of a bureau drawer in the front room. While in there something prompted me to look at that door and what do you think I saw? It really started to open, and there I stood holding the candle high over my head like this," she lifted her hand to illustrate and I noticed that it trembled, "and I got so scared that I couldn't move or even scream. The door swung open just as if somebody was holding on to the knob and entering. When it finally came to a stop I still couldn't see a thing but the jet-black darkness but I thought that hell itself couldn't look more horrible. And, Donn, I can swear that someone actually brushed past me because I could feel a quick, cold breath on my face—then my candle was blown out. Guess you know that I ain't exactly chicken-hearted, but, gee, that was too much. I must have fainted because that's all I remember. When I came to I was lying on the floor, and it was morning. Fever was burning me up and I felt miserably sick and weak. Somehow I managed to crawl back to my bedroom and there I fainted again. When Lady Brown came visiting she found me unconscious on the fur rug—I don't know how long I had been lying there, but it sure seemed a long time. The first thing I asked was about that cursed door. Lady Brown went and

looked and told me it was closed and locked—can you beat that?"

Audrey's cheeks were flushed with excitement, and her eyes, now wide and troubled as a child's, met mine with a wistful glance.

"Well," I commented, feeling that she wanted me to say something, "I guess it was the fever, but it isn't for me to say that it could not have been something beyond the realm of reason. We don't know everything...."

"We don't know nothing, Donn," she interrupted me almost fiercely. "Only that—that you and I love each other—isn't that right?"

"Yes, and my life did not begin until I met you. But please go on with your story."

"There isn't a great deal more, Donn. You know most of it from my letters and surely you don't want me to tell what happened in Dawson, do you?"

Pity and compassion swept over me with a tenderness so strong that tears came into my eyes. Unable to find words, I answered by clutching her in my arms.

"Thanks, Donn," she said, breaking our embrace. "I know you couldn't kiss me like this if you hadn't forgiven me. Gee, but I hate Dawson. That place sure must be close to hell. You used to tell me that tears are good for a person. Well, I sure learned to cry while I was there. And to see you, drunk and looking so miserable, was more than I

could stand. And then you drove me away again when all I wanted was a chance to tell you how much I loved you. I used to visit your cabin but you were always out. All I could do was to straighten things out a bit and then when I noticed the grub was gone I bought a few things I thought you might need and like."

"So it was you, Audrey, who did that?" I cried, interrupting her. "What an ungrateful, low-down brute I was! Will you ever forgive me? I sure don't deserve it."

Her fingers tightened on mine, and she moved closer.

"If I'd been in your shoes, I would have done the very same thing, so there you are! I don't blame you a bit, Donn—never did. Promise me you'll never mention it again."

Speechless, I looked at her. It was a relief to hear her husky voice break the silence.

"I went to Fairbanks sure to find you there—but no such luck. Guess Ed and the baron told you all about it. Well, late the following winter I left for Hot Springs to help with the clean-up in a mine I was interested in. As it happened, this mine was way up among the hills, and miles from the nearest post office. Spring came and went before we returned to Hot Springs and then I got your telegram—two weeks after you'd sent it. It didn't help to rave and cry—although I did plenty of it—because you must have left for Fort

Yukon long time ago. I had money now, lots of it, because my share in the clean-up was a little better than two thousand dollars. Not so bad for grubstaking an old prospector, I think. I just couldn't for the life of me understand why you wanted to meet me in Fort Yukon instead of in Tanana or Fort Gibbon when you were going down the river anyway."

"I made a mistake when I wired you," I explained. "There was no way of correcting it when I found out. I guess it was supposed to happen that way. You have no idea how bad I felt about it."

"It's all right now, so we should worry. In any event I was frantic to get away from Hot Springs, but there wasn't a chance until I got the mail boat to take me down to Tanana. Luck sure was against me, for I had to wait nearly a week for the next boat going up-river. As you know I don't belong to the religious kind but I really prayed many times that you'd either stay in Fort Yukon or that one of the small boats floating down the river would bring you to me. I couldn't wire you at Fort Yukon and a letter wouldn't get there ahead of me so you see I was in a nice fix. I spent all my time that long week in Tanana watching and inquiring. When at last that big side-wheeler came crawling upstream, panting and wheezing like a horse with the heaves, I was so nervous and run-down that I fainted when I got aboard. Gee, Donn, how nice they were to me. I never knew

there's so many kind people in this world. Everybody's been trying to help me since I left Louston. Queer, isn't it, that I should meet so many fine men and women since you came into my life—and never before! It's almost too good to be true. You'll never know how much I love you. Your love is the most decent, most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me. I couldn't go wrong again if my life depended on it. Ah, tell me to shut up when I get so sentimental."

"Never too much so to suit me, dear," I assured her with a fierce, held-up feeling. "I love to hear every word you say. But, please do go on. Can't you see that I'm all excited?"

Her eyes looked into mine, but still without meeting my searching glance; they were lost in something far beyond.

"It must have been during that trip to Fort Yukon that we passed each other. I felt that you must have been near and I was almost delirious worrying and longing. When I got ashore at Fort Yukon I ran up to the store and asked if they had seen anybody looking like a college man—that's all I could think of trying to describe you. And it sure must fit you, because both men in the store said in the same breath that one like that had been there just a few days ago. Guess they felt sorry for me when I broke down and cried because they did everything they could for me. I got your note, and it made me so happy in spite of what had hap-

pened. But why didn't you ask me to meet you some other place?"

"How could I?" I exclaimed bitterly. "I told you that we might finally get to Nome. We didn't have any money and had to keep on going until we'd find something to do. Besides, I had almost given up all hope. I thought I'd go mad brooding over it. Without money or work I couldn't stay any place. We had to keep on going."

"I think I know, Donn, just how you felt." Her voice was like a caress, still it made me wince. "Anyway, I realized one thing up in Fort Yukon, and that was how much you meant to me—more than life! It took a lot of money to travel around the way I did. Half of what I had belonged to you and I wasn't going to spend any of my part foolishly. They wouldn't let me pay for anything where I stayed while waiting for a boat going down the river and they sure treated me like a queen. One of the traders in Fort Yukon wanted me to stay and keep house for him. I told him that I was hired for life by another man. He took it harder than I had expected, so I guess he liked me. And when I left he gave me those two Siberian dogs you like so well. It wasn't much use trying to find you watching the small boats so I decided to go back to Hot Springs and take a later boat for Nome. In the meantime I was going to try to reach you every possible way. I even wrote your parents asking them to forward an enclosed letter. I must have

written you at least a dozen times and I also wrote Ed and the baron, so you see I did my best."

"You're sure a wonderful girl, Audrey—too good for me," I said with words that sounded empty.

"I worked in a road house in Hot Springs a little over a month and then I got both your letters from Tanana. I answered by return mail and enclosed a hundred-dollar bill, hoping you'd have sense enough to keep it this time. Well, to make a long story short, I took the last boat to St. Michael, caught a cold which turned into pneumonia so they had to leave me in Ruby. A kind old doctor and his wife nursed me back to health in their own home. When winter set in I was out of bed. The first mail from Nome after the freeze-up brought your letter, the only one so far in reply to all those I had written. Then I got your telegram asking me to come to Andrefaski. At last we were going to meet! I cried and sang and danced and acted so crazy that the doctor shook his head, but his wife diagnosed it as love and helped me all she could to get ready for the trip. I bought six of the best dogs in Ruby and with the two I already had I wasn't a bit afraid to tackle the trail. Instead of waiting as you had suggested, I decided to beat you to it and meet you on the trail or get to Nome before you'd leave. I started out alone but that didn't work out so well. Luck had it that a young Eskimo in a village where I stopped wanted to go in to Nome, so I hired him to drive the team. The

blizzard held us up in this roadhouse, and that's how we happened to meet the way we did. You don't owe your life to me, Donn. You owe it to Graben, to your leader. If it hadn't been for him, we'd never have gone out to look for you. Did I tell you that my dogs almost tore him to pieces when he came here and that it took the three of us to get him away? When I found your initials on his collar all life seemed to go out of me. I really don't remember a thing except crying and screaming. The roadhouse keeper claims that I pulled my gun and threatened to kill him if he didn't help to get my dogs hitched up right away—guess I did. You know the rest of it, Donn, except that it just doesn't seem to be possible. It's too wonderful to be true!"

OUT OF the bewildering maze of thoughts and emotions, which finally had surged as a mighty wave to a breaking crest, there was then heard only a whisper. In the age-worn phrase, now so quietly, so solemnly spoken, was again promised the nearest approach to happiness most of us are ever permitted to know:

“Audrey, I love you, love you!”

Echo, always active here in its playground of steep hills and narrow valleys, could have answered for her almost with my own words. But my message of love was only a low whisper and not given to be carried on Echo’s wings of frost-laden air. Her voice was thick and hushed like mine when she took my words and made them her own with irresistible sincerity, though ever so slowly, ever so gently this time:

“Donn, I love you, love you too. . . .”





Fierce passion weaves its own story of tragic and ecstatic consequences in YOUTH NORTH. A gripping encounter with an arctic blizzard, an adventurous trip down the lonely Yukon, and a breath-taking voyage on the Bering Sea in a sixteen-foot boat are episodes in the relentless destiny that tears Donn and Audrey from one another and brings them together again for a romantic reconciliation. Youth's challenge to fate is answered with an intense flash of emotional conflicts and unhappy social contrasts, yet the experience into which Donn and Audrey are drawn brings its own recompense of rich understanding and deep love.

